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GREAT LEADERS SERIES

EDITED BY E. HERSHEY SNEATH, PH.D., LL.D.
YALE UNIVERSITY

THE HEROES OF ISRAEL'S GOLDEN AGE

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THE HEROES OF ISRAEL'S GOLDEN AGE

FROM SAMUEL TO MICAH

BY

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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The "Great Leaders Series" aims to meet the needs of moral and religious secondary education. Adolescence is preëminently the period of Idealism. The naïve obedience to authority characteristic of childhood is to a large extent supplanted at this time by self-initiative; by self-determination in accordance with ideals adopted or framed by the individual himself. Furthermore, the ideals of this period are concrete rather than abstract. They are embodied in individual lives, and, generally, in lives of action. Hence biographies of great leaders appeal strongly to the adolescent. They furnish examples and stimulus for conduct along the higher lines. The "Great Leaders Series" will include a number of volumes devoted to the study of some of the great moral and spiritual leaders of the race. Although designed primarily for use in the class-room, they will serve admirably the purposes of a general course of reading in biography for youth.

E. Hershey Sneath.

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
JUL 16 1957

PREFACE

Although written primarily for use in secondary education this book will also, it is hoped, be found of interest and value to the general reader. It is the second of the three Old Testament volumes in the Great Leaders Series, being preceded by that of Professor I. F. Wood on *The Heroes of Early Israel,* and followed by that of Professor H. T. Fowler on *Great Leaders of Hebrew History.* This particular volume covers the vitally important period of Hebrew history extending from the beginnings of the monarchy in the eleventh century B.C. to the closing activities of the great social prophets of the eighth century. The biographies of some of the foremost heroes of the Old Testament are, therefore, included.

Recent years have witnessed a notable revival of interest in Old Testament study as an essential part of religious and general education. The leading American colleges have already gone so far as to grant one or two credits for duly accredited Bible work offered for entrance. This makes it much easier for the secondary school to offer courses in the Bible that shall be as thoroughgoing as any of the other courses in the curriculum. At the same time the dignity thus conferred on Bible

study as an integral part of a well-rounded education makes the Bible itself far more effective as a means of inculcating high ideals and lofty purposes. It is to meet the pressing need for text-books in this important field that the present volume is offered.

Throughout the book an attempt has been made to show the interrelations of history and religion, and the formative and creative influence of eminent leaders. It has been impossible, of course, in a volume like this to give reasons for the positions taken on mooted points. The results of the work of many scholars working in the Old Testament field have been freely utilized; only a few of their works are indicated in the List of Books. So far as direct quotations are concerned, the writer has attempted to translate the original Hebrew as literally as was consistent with the clear and effective presentation of the thought.

Each teacher will naturally prefer to follow his own methods in using this book. Wherever possible, however, the student should be encouraged to acquire for himself an acquaintance with the Biblical records; for this purpose reading references are given at the end of each chapter. If these make the assignment too long, it may be possible to devote two days to a lesson. In case three periods a week are available for Bible study it is possible to cover the whole Old Testament within a year by including with the present volume those by Professors Wood and Fowler already mentioned.

Grateful acknowledgment is due Professor E. Hershey Sneath, general editor, and Professors Wood and Fowler for suggestions as to arrangement of material and methods of approach; also to Professor C. C. Torrey for assistance in revising proof.

GEORGE DAHL.

Yale Divinity School,
June 1923.

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THE HEROES OF ISRAEL'S GOLDEN AGE

THE HEROES OF ISRAEL'S GOLDEN AGE

CHAPTER I

SAMUEL THE KING-MAKER

His Childhood and Youth

Need for Hebrew Unity.—At the close of the turbulent period of the Judges the Hebrew people needed above all else a sense of national unity. But this spirit of coöperation was conspicuously lacking. The loose federation of Israelite clans, formed under Moses and Joshua, had largely gone to pieces. Losing the fresh and powerful religious enthusiasm of those earlier days, the tribes had fallen into constant fault-finding and occasional open warfare among themselves. It will be remembered, for example, that both Gideon and Jephthah had considerable difficulty with the fierce jealousy of the Ephraimites. Again, the story of the almost complete extermination of the tribe of Benjamin because of the outrage at Gibeah is a glaring illustration of the absence of any feeling of real unity among the Hebrews.

It was only natural that this disunity should have

existed. Back of the times of the Judges lay the nomadic life in the wilderness. The clans and tribes of the Arabian desert have always been democratic to a fault and passionately fond of their independence. Only once or twice in all history, as for example under Mohammed, have they been able to form an effective union. The nomad Hebrews showed much the same disposition. Even in the conquest of Canaan they had failed to act as a unit. A single tribe, or a special coalition of two or three tribes or clans, would capture a bit of territory for itself. As for the Judges, it is clear that they did not rule over a united Israel; they were local heroes who delivered their own districts from outside rule. The bickerings and jealousies of the original thirteen colonies in America furnish a fairly close parallel to the attitude of the Hebrew tribes toward one another under the Judges.

If the Hebrew nation and religion were to survive at all, some effective means of union had to be found. Not only were the tribes a danger to one another—each was confronted as well by foes from without. On every side they were surrounded by hostile nations. To the east they faced Arameans, Ammonites and Moabites; to the southeast, Edomites; to the southwest, Amalekites; and to the west, Philistines. All of these regarded fertile Canaan with hungry eyes. In addition to all this the original Canaanites still held large portions of the land. It is true that all the outside peoples except the Philistines had been forced into a temporary peace. But the least sign of weakness on

the part of the Hebrews would be the signal for attack. And already the Philistines were pressing hard. The exploits of rough and robust Samson had accomplished nothing toward breaking their power. Upon its ability to get together, then, depended the survival of the Hebrew state.

Foreign oppression endured during the centuries when the Judges ruled, had, it is true, welded the people as by sledge-hammer blows into a common hatred of the neighboring states. But hatred is never a sufficient basis for lasting union. Two things more were essential for the attainment of the needed unity: (1) some definite critical event that would clearly show the absolute necessity for concerted action; (2) a leader strong enough to make use of the opportunity to unite the tribes when it came. The required crisis came when the Philistines, having defeated the Hebrews, captured the sacred ark, the revered residence of Jehovah; Samuel, seer and prophet, proved to be the long-sought man of destiny.

Importance of Samuel.—Samuel ranks second only to Moses as a shaper of early Hebrew history. Moses had succeeded, as we have seen, in gathering together some of the tribes and clans that later made up the Hebrew nation into a loosely knit, temporary federation united by common loyalty to Jehovah. Samuel now goes further and takes the lead in selecting a king, thus establishing a more permanent and more inclusive union. He is the great prophetic link between the period of the Judges and that of the Kings. Himself often reckoned the last of the

Judges, he is at the same time the foster-father of the monarchy. Too unselfish to take power into his own hands, he chose first Saul and then David to save the nation from the extinction threatened by the repeated attempts of the Philistines to extend their sway.

Sources of the Books of Samuel.—Two distinct sets of stories of the times have been preserved for us in the Books of Samuel. One is by an author who wrote shortly after the death of Solomon. His work is a good example of Hebrew narrative at its best, clear, vivid, simple and full of interesting incident. According to this writer, the founding of the kingdom was in full accord with God's will.

The other group of stories, put in written form a century or more later, was by an author who felt impelled to recast the earlier history so as to bring out more clearly its religious teachings. This writer is more formal and less vivid than the other. As he looks backward over the nation's history, he is convinced that kings are a curse rather than a blessing. He, too, believes that God founded the kingdom, but not as a mark of his favor. On the contrary, he tells us that God granted the people's demand for a king in order to punish them for thus rejecting himself. These two groups of stories were woven together by later editors, with the result that in many cases two slightly different records of the same event stand side by side. This method of combining histories is much the same as that followed in the books from Genesis to Judges.

The Boy Samuel.—The beautiful stories that

cluster about the childhood and youth of Samuel are recorded only in the later of the two sets of narratives. In these stories we hear about his birth, his dedication to the service of the temple at Shiloh, and God's revelation to him of disasters about to come upon the house of Eli.

Birth of Samuel.—A certain Elkanah was a citizen of Ramah in the tribe of Ephraim. Like many men of means in those days he had more than one wife. One of his two wives, Peninnah (Coral, or Pearl), had children, a boon ardently desired by all Hebrew women. The other wife, Hannah (Grace), suffered the humiliation of being childless.

At Shiloh in the territory of Ephraim stood the temple in which was housed the ark of Jehovah. Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were the priests in charge of this shrine. Once each year, probably at the time of one of the great feasts, Elkanah and his family used to go to Shiloh to worship and offer sacrifices. It was early Hebrew custom that, after Jehovah's part of the sacrificial animal had been burned on the altar and the priests had received their share, the worshiper used the rest of the flesh to provide a religious feast for his family. On these occasions, therefore, Elkanah would give Peninnah and each of her children a portion of the flesh. Hannah received, of course, but the one portion for herself.

On one of these visits Hannah was so overcome with grief over this reminder of her childlessness that she burst into tears and would not eat. In

vain her husband sought to comfort her. "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" he asked.

At the end of the meal Hannah rose sadly and entered into the temple. She stood and prayed to Jehovah, weeping bitterly the while. And this is the vow she made: "If you, Jehovah, will graciously remember me and give me a male child, I will dedicate him to the service of your temple all the days of his life."

Eli the priest was sitting on a seat at the doorposts of the temple. Seeing Hannah's lips move but hearing no sound, he suspected that she was drunk from the effects of too much wine at the family feast. "How long will you behave like a drunken woman?" he asked her. "Put away your wine and begone." "No, my lord," explained Hannah, "I am a woman of sorrowful spirit, and have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink. Rather have I been praying earnestly before Jehovah. Do not take me for a vile woman." Convinced that she spoke the truth, Eli dismissed her with his blessing: "Go in peace, and may God grant the petition you have asked of him." She went her way greatly comforted.

Early the next morning Elkanah and his family worshiped at the temple, and then returned to their home at Ramah. A year from that time Hannah gave birth to a son, whom she named Samuel. She translated the name as, "Asked of God."

When the time of the feast came round again, Elkanah prepared to start with his family on the

annual pilgrimage to Shiloh. Hannah excused herself from making the journey. "When the boy is weaned," she said, "I will bring him. Then he shall live there all his life." Her husband agreed and added a prayer that their lives might be spared to fulfil her purpose. Hannah remained at home and nursed the child for several years.

Dedication of Samuel.—After her son had been weaned, Hannah brought him to the temple at Shiloh. There she offered as part of the ceremony of dedication the sacrifices she had brought. She then led Samuel to Eli, and reminded him of the prayer and vow she had made several years before. So she dedicated the lad to life-long service of Jehovah, and returned to Ramah.

During the years that followed Samuel, clad in the usual priestly garments, served at the Shiloh temple. Each year Hannah made an outer garment for her son, and brought it to him at the time of the family's annual visit. On one of these occasions Eli blessed Hannah and her husband, and prayed that Jehovah might reward her for the gift of Samuel to the divine service. In answer to Eli's petition, three sons and two daughters were granted her. Meanwhile, Samuel continued his service at Shiloh, constantly increasing in favor both with God and man.

Wickedness of Eli's Sons.—The sons of Eli were extremely depraved. Priests though they were, they repeatedly showed contempt for the offerings made to Jehovah. Instead of remaining satisfied with the share of the sacrifice assigned to them by

custom or law, they arrogantly demanded more. Whenever a man offered sacrifice they would, without legal authority, send their servant with a three-pronged fork to plunge into the pot where the worshipers were cooking flesh. All that came up with the fork the servant would seize for them. They would thus interrupt the most solemn ceremonies of sacrifice in order to take more food for themselves.

Eli had grown very old, and seemed helpless to control his sons. He did, indeed, reprove them for their impiety and violence; but they gave no heed. So they went on toward their doom, regardless of warnings or entreaties. It was to condemn the wickedness of these sons that Samuel was first called to be a prophet.

Call of Samuel.—By far the most important object in the Shiloh temple was the ark of God. This was a portable wooden chest in which Jehovah made his dwelling. It probably contained a sacred stone. Young Samuel slept at night in the room with the ark and thus guarded it from possible harm. A lamp burned before the sacred object all night long.

One night Samuel, sleeping in the temple, was suddenly awakened by the call, "Samuel! Samuel!" Supposing that Eli, who slept in the adjoining room, had summoned him, he ran and said, "Here I am; for you called me." Eli replied, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. After a short time the call was repeated: "Samuel! Samuel!" and again Samuel ran to Eli, only to learn

that he had not called. The lad did not realize that Jehovah had been calling. A third time the call came, and once more Samuel ran to Eli. This time the truth flashed upon Eli. "Go, lie down," he said. "And if someone calls you say, 'Speak, Jehovah, for your servant is listening!'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Once again Jehovah called, "Samuel! Samuel!" This time Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening!" Jehovah said solemnly, "I am about to visit unbelievable punishment upon Eli and his family, because of the sin of his sons in blaspheming me."

When morning dawned Samuel opened the doors of the sanctuary as usual. He was afraid to tell of the vision. He therefore said nothing until Eli called him and demanded that he conceal no part of God's message. Then Samuel told everything. The poor old priest could only say, "It is Jehovah; let him do what seems best to him."

According to the narrator, this incident marked the beginning of Samuel's national reputation as a prophet. As he grew older, all Israel from Dan to Beersheba learned to know about his prophetic gifts and journeyed to Shiloh to consult him. However, the fact that some years after this event, Samuel's neighbor, Saul, had apparently never heard of him would indicate that he did not really become a national figure until much later. But in any case he was certainly prominent locally even as a young man; in later life it was he who made and unmade kings.

These charming stories of Samuel's childhood and youth furnish a fitting background for his great services to the nation as its leader in attaining real unity. They show the influence of a devoted and religious mother, and his own consecration to the highest he knew. They remind us, too, of the gracious stories of a mother at Bethlehem eleven centuries later, and of her Son for whom it was likewise supreme delight to be in his Father's house.

Biblical passage: I Samuel 1 to 3.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVENTURES OF THE ARK OF GOD

The Philistines.—About the time the main body of the Hebrews entered Palestine (1200 B.C.) another invasion of the land was also going on. The Philistines, a group of tribes from southern Asia Minor and the islands of the Ægean Sea, were attacking the cities of the fertile coast plain by land and sea. Unified, powerful, and warlike, these immigrant people had rather an easy task subduing the native Canaanites. A comparatively short time saw them masters of the plain from Mount Carmel to the Egyptian border.

Meanwhile the Hebrews were painfully wresting the hill country from the Canaanite inhabitants. Lacking as they did the close-knit unity of the Philistines, their task was a more difficult one. Still, by the time of Samson, they held most of the highlands, and were already beginning to look down with envious eyes upon the fertile plains beneath, now firmly held by the Philistines. The exploits of Samson show the beginnings of guerrilla warfare between the two groups of invaders. It was inevitable that the Hebrews pushing westward and the Philistines pressing inland through the mountain passes should some day meet in open

warfare. By the time Samuel had reached manhood the issue was squarely joined.

The Loss of the Ark.—It was in the plain of Sharon, between Aphek and Ebenezer, that the first great battle was waged. Although the Hebrews fought valiantly, they were badly worsted by their trained and unified foes. In the preliminary engagement four thousand Israelites fell. Still confident that Jehovah was superior to the deities of the Philistines, the Hebrew leaders determined to save the day by calling in supernatural aid. They argued that they must certainly win if the God of battles were with them in his own person. Post-haste they sent to the shrine at Shiloh for the sacred ark in which Jehovah dwelt. The two sons of Eli quickly responded to the call, and came bearing the holy object.

The triumphant shout that rose from the Hebrew host to greet the ark greatly alarmed the Philistines. When they knew that the ark of Jehovah had been brought, they were still more desperately afraid. "These are their gods," they cried; "they have come to them to the camp. Woe to us! Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? Take courage and be men, Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been your slaves."

Confidently the Hebrews advanced to the attack, doubtless repeating the ancient cry that was raised whenever the ark advanced into battle,

> "Rise Jehovah and let your enemies be scattered.
> Let them that hate you flee before you."

As for the Philistines, their very despair lent them courage and strength. They met the onslaught with vigorous resistance. The result was that the too sanguine Hebrews, despite the presence of the ark, went down to decisive defeat. Thirty thousand of their foot soldiers perished, the ark was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died on the field of battle.

Death of Eli.—With clothes torn and earth strewn on his head, a Benjamite soldier, fleeing from the disastrous field, reached Shiloh that same day. He showed by his dress and bearing that something terrible had happened. The citizens watched his approach with silent apprehension. When he told them the outcome of the battle they shrieked aloud.

Eli was sitting on his seat beside the temple gate, anxiously awaiting news of the ark. Hearing the noise of the tumult, he asked in alarm what it might be. In a moment the messenger came running up to him and breathlessly delivered his message. "Israel fled before the Philistines," he reported; "there was a great slaughter of the people; your sons are dead; and the ark of God has been taken." When he mentioned the capture of the ark, Eli fell backward from his seat; and because he was both aged and heavy his neck was broken in the fall.

The news of the fate of the ark and the death of her husband and father-in-law was brought to the wife of Phinehas, Eli's son. The shock was too great for her, and she died after giving birth to a son. In memory of the calamities of that woeful

day the women standing by gave to the little orphan the ominous name, 'Inglorious' (Ichabod).

The Ark among the Philistines.—Strange and stirring adventures befell the captured ark in the land of the Philistines. A series of calamities, which the religious ideas of that day attributed to the sacred object itself, accompanied it on its journeyings.

The first incident occurred at Ashdod, where the trophy had been placed in the temple of the Philistine corn-god, Dagon. On two successive mornings the idol of Dagon was discovered lying face to the ground, apparently worshiping before the ark. On the second of these occasions the Ashdodites found that the fall had broken Dagon's head and hands upon the threshold of the temple. Evidently the Philistine deity, even in his own land and temple, was no match for the god of the Hebrews. Nor was this all. A mysterious and very deadly outbreak of the bubonic plague, marked by the usual boils, broke out in the city. This was also attributed to the unlucky presence of the sacred ark, emblem of an alien God. Now thoroughly frightened, the citizens begged that the ark be sent away.

At a council of the tyrants or rulers of the five principal Philistine cities, it was decided to send the ark to Gath. Here, too, an epidemic of the plague broke out, and the ark was again moved on, this time to Ekron. But at Ekron the deadly pestilence reappeared in even more virulent form. This aroused an uncontrollable fear of the ark on the

part of the people of Ekron. "Send away the ark of the God of Israel," they demanded, "that it may go back to its own place and not kill us and our people." There was no resisting this urgent request. The rulers agreed to send home the perilous thing.

Return of the Ark.—The Philistine priests and diviners advised that they send with the returning ark an offering to appease the offended God of Israel. Only thus, they said, could an end be made of the plague. Obedient to their instructions, five golden boils, one for each of the five cities, were made and sent. The sending of these symbols of the plague would, it was believed, magically remove the disease itself. In order properly to carry the holy ark, the Philistines secured a new cart that had never been made religiously unclean by being used for any purpose.

Two milch cows, still unbroken to the yoke, were harnessed to the load. Their calves were left at home. If the cows, disregarding the promptings of their natural instincts, should turn away toward the land of the Hebrews, the Philistines would be certain that supernatural powers were at work. The cows really did turn their backs upon their young, and started with the cart up the valley that led to the Hebrew town of Beth-Shemesh. There was no further doubt in the mind of the Philistines that the God of the Hebrews was responsible for their recent misfortunes.

It happened that the people of Beth-Shemesh were busily harvesting their wheat and corn in the valley

up which the ark approached. When they saw it coming they ran joyously to greet it. At the field of a villager named Joshua the cows stopped with their load. So they knew that Jehovah willed that the ark should remain there. Then they chopped up the cart for fuel, and on a great stone near by sacrificed the cows as a fitting burnt-offering to Jehovah. The Philistine tyrants, who had followed the ark, returned after they had witnessed its reception by the Hebrews. In after years the stone on which the cows were sacrificed was pointed out to visitors in memory of the adventures of the ark.

But the sacred symbol could be dangerous to friend as well as foe. One of the local families of Beth-Shemesh refused to join in the rejoicing over its return. In some mysterious manner seventy members of this clan died. Frightened by the disaster and now in their turn eager to get rid of the mischief-working treasure, the citizens sent messengers to the neighboring town of Kirjath-Jearim, beseeching the inhabitants to come down and get the ark. This they willingly did. At Kirjath-Jearim it was left in the house of a certain Abinadab. His son Eleazar was ordained priest in order to handle and care for the ark. Here the powerful object rested harmlessly until the time of David. In view of its apparent importance, it is remarkable that neither Samuel nor Saul seem to have paid it any attention during the intervening years.

The Philistine Supremacy.—The episode of the ark did not prevent the Philistines from following up their victories at Ebenezer. The Israelites were

speedily brought into subjection. Philistine garrisons were placed at strategic points in central Palestine. For example, at Gibeah, in the very heart of Benjamin, we soon find a resident overseer settled, with a garrison to support him in the task of keeping the Hebrews submissive to the foreign yoke. According to one account, the Philistines closed every blacksmith shop in the land, so that the Hebrews were obliged to carry even their plowshares and axes to Philistine smiths to get them sharpened. As in the days of Deborah, scarcely a sword or spear was to be found among the Israelites. Disarmed and discouraged as they were, the Hebrews became objects of contempt on the part of their masters. The prayer of many a patriotic Israelite went up continuously to Jehovah that he might raise up one who should deliver them from this hateful bondage.

Biblical passage: I Samuel 4:1 to 7:2.

CHAPTER III

SAUL, DELIVERER FROM THE PHILISTINE YOKE

It was Samuel who showed the way out of the crisis brought on by the Philistine conquest. He saw clearly that the nation must have a strong military leader if it were to survive. If only someone could be found capable of winning the loyalty and support of the brave but disorganized chieftains, deliverance from the foreign yoke might be achieved.

Victory over their hated oppressors was a religious as well as a political need. In that rather primitive civilization people might refuse to hold to a God who showed himself powerless to save his people from bondage. The good name of the Jehovah religion hung in the balance.

Samuel, therefore, exhibited religious as well as political sagacity of the highest order when he chose Saul as the best possible leader under the circumstances. In this country lad he discovered a rare combination of personal charm, military skill and religious fervor—just the qualities needed to unite the people and save the nation. He resolutely put aside all selfish promptings of personal ambition, although he must have known how easy it would have been to assume supreme power for himself.

Secret Anointing of Saul.—The story of Saul's meeting with Samuel is a fascinating one. Saul was a tall, well-built young man of the tribe of Benjamin, belonging to a prominent family in the town of Gibeah. Some asses owned by Saul's father having strayed, Saul and a servant were sent to find them. After several days' vain search they reached the land of Zuph. There Saul proposed to the servant that they return home, lest his father should begin to worry about them.

But the servant had a better plan. "There is a famous man of God living in this city," he suggested; "all that he says surely comes true. Let us go thither; perhaps he can give us information about our quest." Saul objected that they had no present with which to approach the seer. The servant replied by producing a quarter shekel of money (about fifteen cents). Apparently this was enough for the present, for they started into the city to find the man of God.

As they climbed the road leading up to the town, they met some young women on their way out to the city well to draw water. From them they learned that the seer had come home that very day, and that he was at the moment getting ready to ascend to the high place in order to preside over a sacrificial feast. Just as they reached the city gates they met a man coming out. It happened to be Samuel on his way to the sacrifice.

Only the day before Samuel had been told by God that he was to meet on the next day the future king and deliverer of the nation. When he

saw Saul he was assured by an inner voice that this was the man. As they met, Saul asked, "Tell me, I pray, where the seer's house is." He received a most astonishing reply. Not only did Samuel tell him that he was the seer and assure him that the asses had already been found—he also gave him to understand that royal honors were coming to him and to his family. Saul modestly objected that he and his clan were too insignificant for the high office. However, he accepted an invitation to the feast at the high place.

Under Samuel's guidance Saul and his servant reached the high place, and entered the hall where the feast was to be held. The leading men of the village, thirty in number, gathered round the table. Saul, as guest of honor, was placed at the head. At Samuel's command the cook set before him the choice portion of the animal usually reserved for guests of special distinction. When the meal, so significant for the future of Saul and of the nation, was over, they came down into the city. No doubt Saul was tired after his exciting day. On the roof of Samuel's house a bed was spread for him, and he was soon asleep.

About daybreak Samuel called to Saul, "Up, that I may send you on your way." They walked together down the narrow street. When they reached the outskirts of the city Saul's servant was sent on ahead. Then Samuel brought out a flask of oil and poured it over Saul's head. He kissed him and said, "Has not Jehovah anointed you to be ruler over his inheritance?" Thereupon he told Saul

about three marvelous signs that were to happen on his way home.

That same day all three of the signs came to pass. First, Saul met two men who told him of the return of the asses. Then he met three men, one of whom gave him two loaves of bread. The last and most significant sign came at Saul's home town of Gibeah. There he met one of the frenzied bands of the Sons of the Prophets descending from the high place, excitedly playing upon musical instruments. Saul was seized with the prophetic fervor, and joined the wild procession.

His unconventional behavior so shocked his old acquaintances, who had expected nothing so extreme from their usually normal friend, that they uttered a proverb destined to become famous in Israel: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" [1] When the prophetic impulse had passed, Saul went quietly home to Gibeah to await his opportunity.

Saul Made King.—New hopes and a realization of hidden powers sprang into being in Saul as a result of his remarkable encounter with Samuel. He now had a definite object in life, that of freeing his land from the detested Philistine scourge. As yet only he and Samuel shared the secret of his ambitions. Until the occasion should arise when he might publicly take the lead, he returned to the work of the farm.

After a month of waiting, Saul's great chance came. Messengers arrived at Gibeah with a strange

[1] I Samuel 19:18-24 gives a slightly different account of the origin of this proverb.

tale. It appeared that the Hebrew town of Jabesh-Gilead beyond the Jordan was under siege by the Ammonites. Hard pressed, the citizens had offered tribute to the plunderers and asked for terms of peace. With brutal insolence Nahash, the Ammonite chief, demanded permission to put out the right eye of every male in the town as a preliminary to discussing peace. This would have forever exposed the citizens to the jeers and gibes of all who heard of it. They managed to wrest from their confident foe a seven days' truce, during which they were free to send out requests for help. At the end of the week they were to surrender. Nahash was sure the Hebrews were too disunited and cowardly to do anything for their wretched countrymen of Jabesh-Gilead.

The people of Gibeah wept loudly when the messengers told their story. As they were in the midst of the hubbub, Saul happened to come in from the day's work, driving his yoke of oxen. As soon as he found out what was the matter, he proceeded to act. Impulsively hewing the oxen to pieces, he sent the bloody tokens to all parts of Israel with the threat, "Whoever does not come after Saul, so shall his oxen be treated."

In response to this energetic call for volunteers, the Israelites gathered quickly in large numbers. Saul was able to surprise and rout the haughty Ammonites in a dawn attack. This bold and decisive action was enough to mark him as the divinely chosen leader of the nation. The newly collected army marched to the ancient sanctuary

of Gilgal, where they formally installed him as king.

To be sure, his kingdom was yet to be won. The Philistine armies still held Israel in subjection. And yet the choice of a king for any considerable group of the Hebrew tribes was a notable step in advance. It showed that local jealousies and rivalries could be set aside in common loyalty to an efficient leader. This was the humble beginning of the united Hebrew kingdom that was to reach its greatest glory in the next reign—that of David.

A later historian[1] than the one we have been following did not share the enthusiasm of earlier times about King Saul. He represents the election as an act of disloyalty to Jehovah, their true king, and as a backsliding from earlier ideal conditions. Modern historians, however, are inclined to agree with the earlier records, and to regard the establishment of the kingdom as an essential step, under divine providence, in the development of Hebrew religion. Unless the people had in some such way reached unity, it is difficult to see how they could have fulfilled their world mission.

Battle of the Pass of Michmash.—For a time the Philistines showed little concern about Saul and his exploits. What did they care about the local wars and internal arrangements of the subject race? So long as the tribute money came in promptly they were inclined to let well-enough alone. In their eyes Saul was an insignificant local chief. Nor were they far from the truth. His powers were really

[1] See I Samuel 8; 10:17-25; 12.

not very definite outside the limits of his own tribe of Benjamin.

Saul quietly utilized the times of peace to prepare for the coming war of independence. About him he gathered a standing army of three thousand men. With these he garrisoned three strategic fortresses, Bethel, Michmash and Gibeah. These strongholds commanded the main roads in such a way as to discover and check promptly any threatening invader.

But before his preparations were quite ready, his hand was forced by his impulsive son Jonathan. The beloved crown prince commanded the Hebrew forces in Gibeah. Growing impatient of delay, he attacked and drove out the Philistine garrison stationed in the town. This act of revolt could hardly be overlooked. It roused the Philistines into prompt and vigorous action. Advancing evidently from the north, they forced Saul to evacuate the strongholds of Bethel and Michmash. He fell back on Gibeah, just across the deep ravine from Michmash. His soldiers deserted in large numbers, some crossing the Jordan and others hiding in caves, and among the rocks, and in tombs and pits. Soon he had only six hundred men left with which to hold Gibeah. The advancing Philistines found little opposition anywhere. Leaving a small detachment to hold Michmash and keep watch of Saul's diminished forces across the ravine, they sent out bands of plunderers to loot, burn and kill.

Once more Jonathan compelled action, and by a bold stroke saved the infant kingdom from an-

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Gorge of Michmash, Scene of Jonathan's Brave Exploit

nihilation. One day as he was standing at Gibeah looking across the ravine to the Philistine camp, he decided it was time for action. He turned to his attendant squire and suggested that they two should quietly descend to the bottom of the valley and there show themselves to the Philistine sentinels. If the sentinels invited them to come up, they were to take it as a favorable omen from Jehovah.

The plan worked as Jonathan had expected. When he and his companion appeared the Philistine sentinels were highly amused, and called out jestingly, "Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes in which they hid themselves." Then they dared the two adventurers. "Come up to us," they shouted, "and we will show you something."

Accepting this challenge as the omen they were seeking, the two Hebrews scrambled up the rough face of the cliff. Their bold action confused the guards and made them uncertain what to do. They suspected that a large force of soldiers might be behind Jonathan. While they were hesitating he appeared and, with the aid of his companion, managed to dispatch twenty of the Philistines. So furious was the onset that the earth seemed to tremble. In wild panic the hastily gathering Philistines began to turn their weapons indiscriminately upon friend and foe alike. To add to their bewilderment, the Hebrew captives and camp-followers rallied to the aid of their fellow-countrymen.

From his station at Gibeah, Saul happened just then to glance across to Michmash. What he saw puzzled him. A disordered mob was surging to

and fro, apparently in aimless confusion. Wild shouts arose. Upon inquiry he learned that Jonathan and his squire were missing. Suspecting that they were in trouble, he called hurriedly for the sacred ark. But before the priest could seek direction of Jehovah, the struggle across the ravine showed clearly that the moment for decisive and speedy action had arrived. So Saul gave orders to stop the ceremony of consulting the oracle. Quickly collecting his forces, he rushed over to help against the Philistines. Before this new onslaught they fled westward toward the valley of Ajalon, and thence to their own coast plains. As their mob rushed wildly on, the Hebrews who had hid from before them arose from their hiding-places and joined in the pursuit. It was a glorious day in Israel's history.

Saul's Rash Vow.—One unfortunate incident, however, marred the glory of the day. In order to secure the special favor of Jehovah, Saul foolishly laid upon the pursuing soldiers the vow: "Cursed be the man who eats any food until evening and until I avenge myself on my enemies." This meant that the chase must be continued with no opportunity for the exhausted and hungry soldiers to refresh themselves with food. The natural result was that they were prevented from following up their victory to the fullest extent.

Moreover, the famished men, the moment the sun set and the ban was off, rushed upon the captured sheep, oxen and calves, and killed and ate them with the blood still in the flesh. To us, this

may not seem a mortal sin. But among ancient people generally, and among the Hebrews in particular, the eating of the blood was strictly forbidden by the priestly law. The blood belonged to the deity and had to be poured out upon the ground as a sacrifice. As soon as Saul was aware of what was happening, he hastily constructed an altar. To this the animals were then brought to be killed, and the blood was properly disposed of.

Another unfortunate result of Saul's rash vow was not so easily corrected. It seems that Jonathan was not present when his father made the vow; consequently he knew nothing of it. In the pursuit of the Philistines he came upon some honey which the bees had abandoned. Dipping his spear into it, he ate and was refreshed. When, after sunset, Saul proposed that they continue the chase after the enemy and sought counsel from Jehovah, the oracle was silent. Evidently the ban had been violated by someone. The penalty was death.

Urim and Thummim, the sacred lots, were resorted to in order to discover the guilty person. The first drawing indicated that either Saul or Jonathan was the offender. Fearing to lose their king or the heroic prince, the people protested against going any farther. But Saul overruled their protest. At the next cast, the lot fell on Jonathan. He frankly confessed his sin of ignorance. "I did indeed taste a little honey," he acknowledged. "Lo, I am ready to die!" Saul replied, "Yes, you must indeed die, Jonathan."

But the soldiers would not permit their hero to

be sacrificed in this fashion. In the account of the event we read that people "ransomed" Jonathan—quite possibly by substituting one of their own number! The whole incident—vow, oracle, lot, the belief that God might demand human sacrifice—shows how primitive was the civilization of the age.

By the time all this had happened the night was too far spent to think of renewing the pursuit of the Philistines. From this time on until the last campaign of Saul's life the warfare between the two peoples seems to have been limited to border raids and guerrilla fighting.

Other foes also harassed the young kingdom during the period of Saul's rule. On the east the Ammonites and Moabites, on the south the Edomites and Amalekites, and on the north the Syrians seized every favorable opportunity to plunder the Hebrews. In his turn Saul doubtless stood ready to make similar raids, and very likely supported his army on the spoils of war. Throughout his reign he made the camp his court. Essentially a military leader, he won liberty for his people and organized the beginnings of the nation, thus laying foundations for the greater kingdom of his successors.

Biblical passages: I Samuel 9; 10:1-16; 11; 14.

CHAPTER IV

DECLINE AND DEATH OF SAUL

The friendship and loyal support of Samuel were of the utmost importance to King Saul. To Samuel he owed his high office. It is extremely doubtful whether he would ever have been anything more than a fairly well-to-do farmer had it not been for the inspiration and help of the prophet. After he became king it was essential that he should retain the backing of the religious-political Sons of the Prophets, whose leader Samuel appears to have been. Apparently, however, he made little effort to retain Samuel's confidence and loyalty.

Break between Samuel and Saul.—There is no doubt about the fact that the two leaders became estranged one from the other. Just what caused the final break is not so clear. One story (I Sam. 13) implies that the reason lay in Saul's failure on a certain occasion to wait for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice. But it is hard to see in this incident wherein Saul was at fault. In all good faith he offered the sacrifice himself when the prophet failed to appear at the appointed time. This he had a perfect right to do according to the universal custom at that period.

Another account (I Sam. 15) offers a reason for

Saul's rejection which is more nearly in accord with the beliefs of the period. Saul was divinely commanded through Samuel to war against the Amalekites and put them under the "ban." As in the case of Jericho in early Hebrew history (Joshua 6:21), this meant that every living creature, whether human being or animal, must be killed as an offering to Jehovah. Saul did not carry out strictly this sacred obligation. He retained as spoil the best of the sheep and cattle, and even kept alive Agag, the Amalekite king.

When he returned in triumph, Samuel met him with the words, "What means this bleating of sheep in my ears and the lowing of cattle which I hear?" Saul tried to shift the blame on the people. He claimed that they had spared the best of the animals in order to bring them home and make a sacrifice to Jehovah. Samuel paid no attention to this excuse. He replied,

> "Has Jehovah as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices,
> As in obeying the voice of Jehovah?
> Behold to obey is better than sacrifice,
> And to hearken than the fat of rams."

And then he added the statement that, because of Saul's disobedience, Jehovah had rejected him and would give the kingdom to a better man. The trembling Agag was summoned and hewn in pieces before Jehovah by the prophet's own hand. This action, and in fact the whole idea that the ban was pleasing to God, is part and parcel of the primitive conceptions of religion in this early time.

Beneath the surface there seems to have been still another reason for Saul's rejection. The plain fact was that the king did not measure up to the expectations of Samuel and the prophetic party. His early enthusiasm for religion seems to have waned somewhat as time went on. There is no record, for example, that he ever did anything for the ark. He also grew to resent Samuel's guidance. Worst of all, a nervous disease made him prone to rash and impatient acts. Unable to control himself, he became less and less fit to rule over others. Samuel, therefore, loyal patriot and intense man of God that he was, disappointedly turned elsewhere to find Saul's successor. The reaction of this upon Saul was to increase his natural melancholia, and subject him to sudden fits of jealousy and insane anger. As a consequence he began to decline in power and importance at an early period in his reign. The interest of the Old Testament biographer centers more and more about Saul's successful rival, David.

Advance of the Philistines.—Only once more does Saul step into the center of the stage of history. The occasion is his defeat and death at the hands of the Philistines. A lurid light gleams for a moment about the pathetic figure of the soldier king, throwing into sudden relief the melancholy events of his end.

Between Saul's victory over the Amalekites and his death, important events occurred. In the main, these belong, however, to the story of David and will be described in his biography. Suffice it here to

say that Saul bravely faced Israel's enemies on every side, with varying success. The most troublesome and persistent of all his foes were the vigorous Philistines. "The warfare was severe against the Philistines all the days of Saul."

With the coming to court of the heroic David, son of Jesse, the situation looked hopeful for a while. The young captain attracted strong and valiant men, who were able to render a good account of themselves. Had it not been for Saul's maniacal jealousy of his growing popularity, the national enemies might have been vanquished. As it was Saul foolishly drove away this greatest of his generals. At the same time his excesses lost him the affection of the better element of the nation. Affairs were in a most melancholy state.

Knowledge of Saul's mental affliction and of the consequent disorganization of his kingdom, emboldened the Philistines to make the final decisive attack that resulted in the death of the king. Finding the western approaches to Benjamin too closely guarded to permit an advance, they marched northward to the plain of Esdraelon. This was good strategy for two reasons. The approach from the plain to Saul's realm was gradual and easy. In addition, the presence of the Philistine forces there cut Saul off from contact with the Hebrew tribes to the north.

Saul gathered together all the soldiers he could muster and marched northward to meet the enemy. He stationed his forces on the heights of Mount Gilboa in the southeastern portion of the

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Endor and the Plain of Esdraelon

plain. At Shunem in the plain below the Philistines made their camp.

Witch of Endor.—Something like dismay took hold upon Saul as he looked down upon the imposing host. According to his pious custom he sought direction from Jehovah's oracle. But neither through dreams, nor the sacred lot, nor prophets, did Jehovah answer him. Finally he turned in despair to his attendants and inquired where a medium might be found. "Behold," they replied, "there is a woman at Endor who is a necromancer." Clearly Saul's earlier attempts to root out these pagan mediums and wizards had not been entirely successful.

Disguised and accompanied only by two companions, Saul visited the witch that night. To reach Endor he was obliged, at considerable risk of detection and capture, to circle round the Philistine sentinels. Arrived safely, he demanded of the woman that she call up from the regions of the dead the spirit of Samuel. But she seems to have suspected her gigantic visitor and, therefore, refused to break the drastic laws against sorcery and witchcraft. Saul soothed her fears by swearing that no harm would come to her for granting his demand.

Thus reassured, the medium went into the usual trance state and called up Samuel. When he appeared she screamed, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul." "Do not be afraid," he responded, "What do you see?" "I see a god," she moaned, "coming up out of the earth." He in-

quired, "What is his appearance?" "An old man is coming up," she answered, "and he is wrapped in a cloak." It is to be noticed that Saul himself did not behold the apparition. But he was sure that Samuel was there; so he bent reverently to the ground.

Speaking evidently through the half unconscious medium, Samuel reproached the king: "Why have you disquieted me by bringing me up?" Saul replied, "I am in great distress. The Philistines are warring against me, and God answers me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams. So I have called you to tell me what I shall do." But Samuel refused to give him advice. "Why do you inquire of me," he sternly replied, "when Jehovah has turned away from you and become your foe? Tomorrow you shall fall and your sons with you; and Jehovah will give over the army of Israel into the power of the Philistines."

This melancholy message harmonized with Saul's own fears. Hearing it, he fell in a faint full length upon the ground. Small wonder, for the giant king had gone all day and all night without food. When the medium came out of her trance, she urged her despairing king to eat before going on his way. He refused at first; but his servants joined in insisting that he take food. So the witch hurriedly killed and prepared a fatted calf that was in the house, and baked bread for her guests. At the conclusion of the mournful meal, Saul and his men stumbled off into the night. He went to make

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View of Mount Gilboa

ready for a battle concerning the fatal issue of which he had no question.

Battle of Mount Gilboa.—Battle was joined on Israel's favorite fighting ground—a hilltop. Mount Gilboa offered great advantages for defense against an advancing foe. But these advantages availed little, for the Philistine forces far outnumbered those of Saul; and the hopelessness of the Hebrews determined the result of the battle before it was fought. When the attack came they were so lacking in morale that they offered only slight resistance. Their defeat became a rout, and their flight did not halt until they had put the swift Jordan between them and their pursuers. Even the inhabitants of cities that had not joined in the warfare left their homes in panic. The villages were at once occupied by the enemy. Saul and his three sons, including the beloved Jonathan, perished fighting bravely in defense of a forlorn hope.

Two reports were current concerning the end of Saul. One account (I Sam. 31: 1-6) asserts that he saw the flight of his men and the death of his sons, and was himself wounded. Fearing the disgrace and torture that would be his should he fall into the hands of the enemy, he commanded his armor-bearer to draw his sword and run him through. This the officer refused to do. His reverence for the person of the anointed king was too real to permit him to harm him. Saul, therefore, took his own sword and fell upon it. The loyal armor-bearer, seeing that his master was dead, took his own life in the same manner. Thus did Saul

and his sons and his armor-bearer die together on that tragic day.

The other account (II Sam. 1: 1-16) of Saul's death is that of an Amalekite camp-follower who brought to David at Ziklag the news of the disaster on Gilboa. He reported that he came upon Saul suffering from dizziness but unwounded. With defeat certain, the king begged the Amalekite to dispatch him. This the man willingly did. Then, taking off Saul's crown and bracelet, he brought them to David. No doubt he expected a liberal reward for his zeal. He was rudely disillusioned. In punishment for his sacrilege in slaying "Jehovah's anointed," David had one of his soldiers kill him.

It matters little which of these accounts of Saul's death is nearer the facts. They agree that this first king of Israel died on the field of honor. He deserved better treatment than that which the brutal Philistines meted out to his corpse. They cut off the head and carried it about their own country to advertise their victory over the Hebrews. His armor was hung as a trophy in the temple of their goddess Astarte. Finally, they mockingly fastened his body and those of his three sons on the walls of Bethshan above the Jordan valley.

Recovery of Saul's Body.—One deed of kindness lightens the gloomy record of Saul's end. It will be remembered that the men of Jabesh-Gilead had reason for gratitude to this king, who in happier days had saved them their eyes and their freedom. At tremendous personal risk, certain of them

marched all night and rescued the bodies from their shameful position. They gave the bones decent burial under a well-known tamarisk tree, and as a mark of respect fasted for seven days. Such evidences of gratitude are rare and correspondingly precious.

David's Lament over Saul and Jonathan.—Despite his faults, there were many in Israel who greeted Saul's death with genuine sorrow. Among these none mourned more sincerely than did David. In a noble dirge (II Sam. 1: 19-27), universally recognized as one of the masterpieces of lyric poetry, this minstrel-warrior gave expression to his grief at the death of Saul and Jonathan. The poem is notable alike for fineness of feeling and felicity of expression. Binding it into unity is the phrase, "How are the mighty fallen!" The climax is reached in the closing stanza, which celebrates David's deep love for Jonathan and his anguish at the sense of his loss:

> "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan!
> Very pleasant hast thou been unto me.
> Thy love to me was wonderful,
> Passing the love of women.
> How are the mighty fallen,
> And the weapons of war perished!"

Estimates of Saul.—In the books of Samuel and Chronicles alike Saul is placed in an unfavorable light. His rashness, obstinacy, narrowness, jealousy and vindictiveness are all strongly emphasized. The fact that he died under a cloud, with the

divinely appointed task of delivering Israel from the Philistines hardly begun, influenced the judgment of these historians. In their opinion God had given him up.

Indeed, there is much in Saul's character and life to justify an unfavorable verdict. But it would seem that he has been much too harshly condemned. It has been his misfortune to be compared not only with the noble Samuel, but also with his more brilliant successor, David. His most glaring weaknesses were due in large part no doubt to his mental malady, which seems to have been epilepsy or acute melancholia. Nor must we make the mistake of expecting too exalted a type of leader at this early period. Saul's faults were in the main those of his time and circumstances.

To his credit be it remembered that he was always a brave and capable soldier. It was this quality that made possible his defeat of the Ammonites with the resultant partial welding together of the victorious Hebrew people. His skill as a general kept the Philistines in check for many years, during which Israel was given some opportunity to find itself as a nation. He taught the other neighboring nations that wholesome respect for Hebrew valor which made David's conquests easier to achieve.

There was also a natural generosity and impulsiveness about Saul that kept his followers faithful to the end. Unless, as in the case of David, he came to suspect the loyalty of his men, he treated them magnanimously. According to his lights he

was also a religious man. At all times of crisis he sought guidance at the oracle of Jehovah. His decree against witchcraft shows him to have been in advance of the superstitions common in his age.

Saul's manner of life was severe, simple, democratic. The tide of oriental luxury and sensuousness that was to sweep over David and Solomon did not touch either his personal or court life. The noble democratic ideal of kingship that grew up among the Hebrews owes much to his example. He was not altogether bad. David had ample cause to remember Saul's failings; and yet he joins the king's name with that of his dearest friend Jonathan in his matchless tribute of admiring praise:

> "Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and the pleasant!
> In their lives and in their death they were not divided.
> They were swifter than eagles,
> They were stronger than lions."

Biblical passages: I Samuel 13; 15; 28; 31; II Samuel 1.

CHAPTER V

DAVID IN TRAINING FOR THE THRONE

David Anointed.—Shortly after his breach with Saul, Samuel began his search for a new king who should be better fitted for the high task of ruling Israel. He was directed by Jehovah to seek at Bethlehem among the sons of Jesse. Now Jesse was a farmer who traced his ancestry back to Boaz and Ruth. The romantic story of the courtship and marriage of these two ancestors of David is charmingly told in the book of Ruth.

Samuel knew that he might suffer death for treason should Saul suspect that he was going to Bethlehem to choose a new monarch. So he pretended that his visit had to do solely with a ceremony of sacrifice. Upon his arrival, he arranged for the sacrifice and invited Jesse and his sons. When they came he had seven of Jesse's stalwart sons pass before him. In none of these did the prophet recognize the divinely appointed successor to Saul.

"Are all your children here?" he inquired, disappointed. Jesse answered, "There yet remains the youngest, and behold, he is a shepherd with the flock." "Send and bring him," commanded Samuel, "for we will not sit down until he comes hither."

David was summoned. He is described as a lad fair of complexion, with fine eyes, attractive in appearance. As soon as Samuel saw him, he was assured by Jehovah that this was the man. So, just as he had previously done to Saul, he poured upon David's head the oil of consecration, anointing him to the kingship. Only the brothers were there to see. Thus the prophet, like others of his kind later, made wise use of his power to make and break kings.

David's Introduction to Court.—Two variant accounts are given of the circumstances under which David actually entered into public life. According to the older story an evil spirit from Jehovah used to torment King Saul. This is equivalent to saying that he suffered from epilepsy or acute melancholia. One of the court officers recommended that a good musician be found to charm away the attacks. A young man suggested David. "He is skilful in playing," he urged, "and a valiant man, a warrior, prudent in speech and of good appearance; and Jehovah is with him." Saul accordingly sent for David.

Now, it would never do for anyone to enter the king's presence without a gift. So Jesse sent a modest present with David. Saul found the minstrel-warrior so attractive and capable that he soon made him his armor-bearer. Whenever his attacks overpowered him, David would play soothingly on the lyre and the evil spirit would quickly depart.

David and Goliath.—The other narrative of

David's first appearance before Saul represents him, not as a grown man and experienced soldier, but as a mere shepherd lad, youngest of eight brothers. On a certain occasion his father Jesse sent him with provisions for the three oldest brothers, who were in Saul's army fighting against the Philistines. When David reached the battle line he heard a Philistine giant challenging the Hebrews to send out a champion to settle matters in single combat. This giant, Goliath by name, was ten feet tall, clad in heavy armor and carried a spear whose shaft was like a weaver's beam. For forty days he had stalked between the two armies, defying the terrified Hebrews. No one dared meet him.

But David decided to accept the challenge. His oldest brother laughed at his youthful presumption. Nevertheless he was brought before Saul. "You are only a youth," the king objected, "and he has been a warrior since his youth." Then David told how, in defense of his flock, he had killed a lion and a bear with only his hands for weapons. "Both lion and bear did your servant smite," he said "and this Philistine shall be like one of them. Jehovah, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

Saul was convinced. "Go," he said, "and may Jehovah be with you!" He clothed David in his own armor and gave him his weapons. But David was unaccustomed to the use of such equipment; so he rejected them. He went forth clad only in his

shepherd garb, carrying a club and a sling and five smooth stones out of the brook.

At sight of David the giant cursed him by his gods. "Am I a dog," he shouted, "that you come to me with clubs? Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the heavens and to the beasts of the field." David modestly replied, "You come to me with a sword and a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of Jehovah of hosts. This day Jehovah will deliver you into my hand." They drew near to one another. David reached down and took a stone from his bag. Suddenly it shot from his sling with such force that it sunk into Goliath's forehead. The monster fell face forward to the ground. David instantly ran up and cut off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The Hebrews raised the battle cry and followed in pursuit. Cutting down the stragglers on the way, they chased the enemy clear down to their cities of Gath and Ekron. Only after David's return from the battle, according to this form of the story, did Saul learn who he was.

Oddly enough, it is claimed elsewhere (II Sam. 21:19) that Goliath was killed by Elhanan, one of David's soldiers from his own town of Bethlehem. Some, therefore, have thought that a mistake was made when this exploit was credited to the great king. They suppose that some other heroic deed of his belongs in its place. However this may be, it is clear that David, because of his skill as a

fighter, began to rise in popular favor almost from the moment of his meeting with Saul. Before long the dancing women, as they went forth to meet the returning warriors, were wont to sing responsively,

> "Saul has slain his thousands,
> But David his ten thousands."

The natural result of this was to make the already half-insane king jealously suspicious of his former favorite. He, therefore, dismissed him as armor-bearer and assigned him to a dangerous post at the front. His secret hope was that something might happen to rid him of this inconvenient rival for the affections of the people.

But David continued to win honors in his new position. He constantly strengthened the good opinion in which he was held by the nation. Saul's own son, the crown prince Jonathan, was so completely won over by the courage and winsomeness of David that he entered into an enduring compact of friendship with him.

David's Marriage to Michal.—Romance entered David's life during this period. It happened that Saul's daughter Michal had learned to admire the heroic warrior, and came at length to love him. When Saul was told of Michal's affection for David, he concocted a scheme for getting rid of him. He got some of his courtiers to suggest to David the possibility of his becoming the king's son-in-law. David modestly answered that he was not only unworthy of such a great honor, but also too poor to pay the expected dowry. Saul sent word that proof

of the death of a hundred Philistines at David's hand would be a sufficient price for the bride. Of course he hoped and expected that David would lose his life in the attempt to fulfil the terms. This hope was doomed to disappointment. Within a short time David handed over the tokens of the death of the Philistines. Finding no way out of his bargain, Saul gave Michal to him in marriage. Defeated in this plot and chagrined at seeing his own children won over to his rival, Saul's crazed fear and hate increased by leaps and bounds. He watched only for an opportunity to dispose of David.

Saul's Attempt on David's Life.—One night Saul sent messengers to watch David's house, so that he might kill him in the morning. Michal suspected that something was amiss. "If you do not save your life tonight," she told David, "tomorrow you will be slain." So she helped him get away by letting him down through a window. She then placed an image of the household god in David's bed, and covered it with a garment so as to deceive any who might come in.

When Saul's messengers came to take David, she said, "He is sick." Saul sent them back again, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may put him to death." This time Michal's stratagem was discovered. Saul was furious. Michal was forced to prevaricate in order to escape his vengeance. "He threatened to kill me," she said.

David and Jonathan.—Repeatedly Saul attempted David's life. Twice at least he un-

successfully tried to pin him to the wall with his spear. At these times David found a loyal friend in Jonathan. He acted on each occasion as peacemaker and succeeded in patching up a temporary truce. But Saul's insane jealousy could not be cured. He soon renewed his attempts to kill his popular general. David saw at last that he must depart from Saul's presence.

Just before his final flight from the court he resolved to make a last attempt at reconciliation. He suggested to Jonathan a scheme to test Saul's attitude toward him. On the next day, which happened to be the ancient festival of the New Moon, David was to absent himself from the royal table. If Saul inquired concerning him, Jonathan was to answer, "David urgently asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem, his city; for it is the yearly sacrifice there for all the family." If the king said "Good," then David would know he might safely appear. If, on the contrary, Saul became angry, he would avoid him.

Jonathan agreed to the scheme. He also planned how he might let David know the result. He advised him to conceal himself on the third day following in a field beside a certain heap of stones. Jonathan and a boy would come out as if for target practice. If Jonathan called out to the boy, "See, the arrows are this side of you; pick them up!" then David was to understand that all was well. But if he said, "See, the arrows are beyond you"—David was to make good his escape. With this the friends parted.

When the day of the New Moon came Saul made no comment on David's absence. The following day, however, he inquired irritably, "Why has not the son of Jesse come to the meal either yesterday or today?" Jonathan told the tale of David's visit to the family sacrifice. Saul's anger flared up. Insulting Jonathan with the epithet "son of a depraved woman," he demanded that he produce David that he might put him to death. Jonathan wrathfully retorted, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" For reply Saul lifted up his spear to hurl at him. Jonathan needed no further proof of his father's attitude toward David. So angry and sorry was he that he could eat nothing that day.

At the set time the next morning Jonathan kept the appointment with David. Shooting an arrow he sent the boy after it. While the lad was still running, he shot another farther off. "Is not the arrow beyond you?" he called. So David in his hiding place knew that he must go away. Then Jonathan called again, apparently to the boy but really for David's benefit, "Hurry quickly, tarry not!" The unsuspecting lad hastened to gather up the arrows for his master. Only David and Jonathan understood what had really happened. David fled at once from Gibeah of Saul.

Flight of David.—With neither food nor weapons in his possession, David pressed southward. Arrived at Nob, a settlement of priests just north of Jerusalem, he appealed to Ahimelech the chief priest for provisions. He met the priest's

suspicious questions by pretending that Saul had hastily dispatched him on an important secret errand. Ahimelech was thus persuaded to give him several loaves of the sacred shew-bread. He also equipped David with the sword of Goliath and consulted the divine oracle for him. For all this kindness he was destined to reap a sorry reward later.

David, avoiding his home town of Bethlehem, where Saul was sure to seek for him, hastened to the stronghold of Adullam. This fortress was twelve miles southwest of Bethlehem, and lay in Philistine territory just outside the boundary of Judah, where Saul could not pursue him. A motley crew of followers joined him in this retreat. Fellow-townsmen of Bethlehem, desperate men who had been cruelly oppressed by their masters, runaway debtors, and all who bore a grudge against Saul for whatever reason flocked to his standard. Four hundred of these outlaws were presently gathered under his command. For fear of Saul's brutal vengeance, David removed his parents to Moab, the country of Ruth, and placed them under the protection of its king.

Saul's Vengeance upon the Priests.—When Saul heard of the escape of David, he went into a frenzy of rage. Doeg the Edomite, Saul's chief herdsman, who had been present when David came to Nob, maliciously seized that very moment to relate what he had witnessed. Saul angrily sent for Ahimelech and the rest of the priests of Nob.

"Why have you conspired against me, you and

the son of Jesse?" he demanded of the astonished priest. Ahimelech protested his innocence. But Saul was in no mood to be contradicted. Turning to the men of his body-guard, he shouted, "Slay the priests of Jehovah, for their hand also was with David." But the soldiers shrank from striking down the holy men. So the king turned to Doeg with, "Fall upon the priests!" The Edomite had no delicate scruples and gladly complied. Eighty-five blameless priests were slain by him in cold blood that day.

Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech, somehow escaped the slaughter. There was but one place for him to go—to David. When he informed him of the fate of the priest, David expressed sincere remorse. "I knew that day," he admitted, "when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul."

Effects of Saul's Deeds.—The murder of the priests must have offended many of Saul's subjects. His strange behavior toward David irritated them. Why should he thus drive his ablest general out of the land? At the very time when he needed all possible help against the relentless Philistines he was demoralizing both army and nation. That he did not entirely lose the loyalty of his followers under the circumstances is proof of a certain charm and strength that persisted through all his folly. Nor need we suppose that his entire time was spent in fits of madness and in attempts to kill off his own subjects. We read that he made war against Moab, Ammon, Edom and Philistia, and that he was

victorious everywhere he turned—until the fatal day at Gilboa!

For David to return to Saul's court was now forever out of the question. At Adullam and in the rolling, rocky, desert country of southern Judah, he and his bandits maintained a precarious existence. The stern discipline of wilderness life and warfare developed in him those qualities of courage, resourcefulness, self-restraint and leadership that at length won him the throne. Saul had unwittingly done him a good turn when he drove him into the harsh fitting-school of the desert.

Biblical passages: I Samuel 16 to 22; Ruth.

CHAPTER VI

DAVID, THE OUTLAW CHIEF

Deliverance of Keilah.—Word came to David one day at his bandit refuge of Adullam that the Philistines were making a raid on Keilah, a Judean town three miles to the south. So he went to the oracle, as his custom was, and asked, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The priest cast the lot. "Yes," was the reply. But David's men were still reluctant to meet their powerful foe. Again he consulted the oracle. "Rise, go down to Keilah, for I am giving the Philistines into your power," was the emphatic and heartening answer.

Their doubts thus set at rest, the men quickly covered the ground to Keilah. In the battle which followed the Hebrews won a complete victory and gathered much booty. But they dared not tarry long within a walled city. News was brought that Saul was preparing to attack David. Once more David turned to seek Jehovah's guidance. The oracle informed him that Saul would surely come, and that the citizens of Keilah would not scruple to deliver him up to his implacable enemy. So David and his band went their way. Instead of returning to Adullam, however, they hid in the barren wilderness of Judah overhanging the western shore of

the Dead Sea. In these trackless wastes pursuit was well-nigh impossible. For the moment, therefore, Saul abandoned the hunt for his runaway officer.

The principal problem of desert life is that of finding food enough to keep body and soul together. For a time David and his men secured supplies by making quick raids on the neighboring Edomites and Amalekites. This method was comparatively safe. After each of their sudden attacks, the bandits would lose themselves amongst the forbidding and almost impenetrable hills. These excursions, together with occasional skirmishes with the Bedouin clans that roamed the district, kept David's unruly irregulars busy and fairly contented.

Nabal the Churl.—But as the band gradually increased to six hundred men, the procuring of food began to tax the ingenuity of their leader. David felt perfectly justified under the circumstances in asking for contributions from wealthy land-owners who lived on the edges of the desert. According to the unwritten law of the borderlands, the wilderness bands are entitled to a reward for respecting the rights of the shepherds and villagers, and for protecting them from attacks by their enemies. Most of the land-owners cheerfully paid the tax, so that David was able to provide for the needs of his men.

It was, therefore, with every expectation of receiving a generous gift that David one day sent ten of his young men to a wealthy sheep-owner named Nabal. In fact, as it was the joyous and hospitable

season of sheep-shearing, he may have anticipated a larger donation than usual. What was the surprise of the messengers, upon making their request, to receive a curt refusal. "Who is David?" was Nabal's surly reply. "Many are the slaves nowadays who break away from their masters. Must I give the food prepared for my shearers to men of whom I know not whence they are?"

This contemptuous answer was reported back to David by the young men. His rage knew no bounds. Hastily collecting four hundred followers, he set forth to wipe out the insult in the blood of Nabal and all his household.

Meanwhile one of Nabal's shepherd lads told Abigail, his master's wife, how stingily and foolishly he had treated their protector David. Being a woman of quick wit, as well as of great beauty, she determined to try to avert the trouble she saw threatening. Collecting a generous present of bread, wine, roasted sheep, parched grain, raisins and figs she sent them ahead to David. Some distance behind she herself followed, mounted on an ass.

David had already started on his way to settle the score against Nabal when she met him. Alighting from her beast and kneeling humbly before him, face to the ground, she pleaded, "Hear me! Let not my lord pay any attention to that worthless fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he. 'Fool' is the meaning of his name, and folly is in him. Let this present be given to the young men who follow my lord. When Jehovah shall

have made you prince over Israel, do not let this burden be on your conscience, that you have shed blood without just cause."

Won over by her charm and good sense, David humbly confessed that it was only her intervention that had kept him from becoming guilty of Nabal's murder. He accepted her gifts, promised to spare her husband, and sent her safely home. Upon her arrival she found Nabal feasting riotously, too drunk for conversation. In the morning, however, he was again sober. So she told him of his narrow escape. The shock of the news brought on a stroke of paralysis. Ten days later he had another attack, which proved fatal.

When David heard the news of Nabal's death he said, "Jehovah has turned back upon his own head the evil doing of Nabal." His affection and respect for Abigail prompted him to send messengers to woo her. Inasmuch as it is quite common in the East for a widow to marry again very soon after the death of her husband, we are not at all surprised to learn that she accepted David's proposal. The answer she returned was phrased in terms of oriental exaggeration. "See," she said, "your hand-maid will be a servant to wash the feet of my lord's slaves." Attended by five young women she went with the messengers. In this fashion did the future king win a wise counsellor and true helpmate.

Real love seems to have attracted David to Abigail. This did not, however, prevent him from taking to himself an additional wife during this

outlaw period in the person of Ahinoam of Jezreel. Much later he demanded and secured the return of his first wife, Michal, who had meanwhile been given by Saul to a certain Paltiel. Other marriages were contracted by him at various times, some of them evidently with the desire to cement family connections and alliances that would help him toward the throne. In all this he was but following the custom of the age. Monogamy had not yet been established, especially in the case of the rich and powerful.

Saul's Life Spared.—Saul's disordered mind gave him no rest during those days. Despite the difficulties involved, he headed several expeditions into the hill country of Judah in pursuit of David. It was at this time that David showed real greatness of spirit in sparing Saul's life when he had him in his power.

Two records of this adventure have come down to us. According to one story it occurred while David and his men were hiding from Saul's forces in the dark recesses of a great cave in the wilderness of Engedi. The king happened to enter, and came so close that David might easily have killed him. This his men urged him to do. But he refused. "He is Jehovah's anointed," he said. All he did was to steal near and secretly cut off the skirt of Saul's robe. Saul departed from the cave unharmed, never suspecting the danger to which he had been exposed.

As soon as he had gone, David also came out. He ran after the king and showed him the piece

of the robe in his hand, crying, "Why do you listen to the words of the men who say, 'See, David is seeking to harm you'? This day your eyes see that Jehovah gave you into my hand in the cave and I refused to kill you. See the skirt of your robe in my hand." Saul was deeply touched by this proof of David's magnanimity. He wept aloud. But David knew better than to trust the king's varying moods. So they separated, Saul returning to the court and David to his wilderness stronghold.

The other and earlier account of this generous deed of David pictures the king and three thousand of his men, in the course of their pursuit of David, asleep in camp in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul's spear was stuck upright in the earth at his head. As among the Arabs to-day, this marked the position of the chief of the expedition. Abner, Saul's commander-in-chief, lay slumbering beside him.

That night, with his nephew Abishai as his sole companion, David crept into the camp. When the two adventurers discovered the sleeping king, Abishai begged, "Let me smite him with his spear to the earth with one thrust." According to all the laws of ancient warfare David would have been entirely justified in thus disposing of his persecutor. But he forbade Abishai to harm him. He could await God's time. "Jehovah will surely smite him," he said. "Or his day shall come to die; or he shall go down into battle and perish." It is to David's everlasting credit that he acted according to so high an ethical standard.

One thing, however, David did do. He seized the king's spear and the jug of water standing beside it. Then he and Abishai stole away undetected. On the top of a hill across the wide valley he halted. Raising his voice he called, "Do you not answer, Abner?" Thus rudely awakened, the commander shouted back, "Who are you that calls?" "Why did you not guard your lord the king?"—David reproached him. "As Jehovah lives ye deserve death because ye have not guarded the anointed of Jehovah. And now see where the king's spear is and the water-jug that was at his head!"

At this Saul's feelings toward David passed through another lightning change. "I have sinned," he lamented. "Return, my son David, for I will do you no more harm." But David did not dare to accept this invitation of the fickle king. After returning the spear he departed with Saul's blessing. They never met again, for Saul fell shortly after.

David a Philistine Vassal.—Wearied at length of the hard wilderness struggle and eager to get out of Saul's reach, David determined to escape to the land of the Philistines. Accompanied by his six hundred followers and their households, he went to Gath and enrolled himself under the banner of its powerful king, Achish. Ahinoam and Abigail, his wives, accompanied him. When Saul learned of David's flight, he ceased pursuing him.[1]

But life at the court of Achish, complicated as

[1] In I Samuel 21:10-15 there is another account of David's escape to Achish.

it was by the task of keeping peace between his own impetuous followers and the Philistines against whom they had so often battled, soon became irksome. David, therefore, approached the king with the request, "Let a place in one of the towns in the open country be given me, that I may dwell there." On the edge of the desert lay the town of Ziklag. To this border town David and his company were assigned. David became its chief.

Once settled in Ziklag, David led his Israelite warriors in frequent raids against the neighboring Bedouin tribes. After each of these forays he falsely reported to Achish that he had been making war on Judah and her allies. As a matter of fact the raids were directed against people with whom Achish seems to have had no special quarrel. On the theory that 'dead men tell no tales,' David always took pains to put to death every man and woman of the clans he plundered. Thus he kept from the king's ears all news of his real movements. The result was to hoodwink Achish into the belief that his new vassal had completely broken with his old friends in Judah. Such deception was no doubt common in those days and was considered clever rather than wrong.

So complete was Achish's confidence in David that he invited him to join in the great campaign of the Philistines against Saul. David's reply was purposely ambiguous. "You will soon know," he assured him, "what your servant will do." Achish replied, "Therefore I make you my bodyguard

from this time on." So their forces marched together to the plain of Esdraelon.

What David would have done had he actually been called upon to fight Saul, we can only guess. Happily, the suspicions of the Philistine leaders solved his difficult problem. Noticing, at the final muster of the troops, the presence of the Hebrews, they inquired, "What are these Hebrews?" Achish told them about David's falling away from Saul and his faithful(?) service in the Philistine cause during two years.

But the chiefs recalled David's former exploits against them, and feared treachery on his part. Achish was, therefore, obliged to dismiss him, apologizing profusely as he did so. David pretended to feel hurt because he was not permitted to fight against the enemies of his overlord. Achish tried to comfort him. "I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God," he said. "Nevertheless the chiefs of the Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.' Now, therefore, rise early in the morning as soon as it is light, and depart."

To his own intense relief, no doubt, and perhaps concealing a smile at the success of his acting, David began the march back to Ziklag. Meanwhile events were rapidly moving toward the tragedy on Gilboa.

Pursuit of the Amalekites.—David's absence with the Philistines had given the Amalekites an opportunity to secure revenge for his frequent raids upon them. They had made a sudden descent upon

Ziklag and burned the houses to the ground. The women and children they carried off as captives, doubtless with the intention of selling them as slaves in the Egyptian market. Consequently the Hebrew band came home to a scene of utter desolation. No joyous shout of welcome rose to greet them as they drew near.

The realization that their homes and dear ones were lost so embittered the men that they debated stoning David. Only his strong faith in God saved him from absolute despair. Summoning Abiathar the priest, he put to the divine oracle these two questions: "Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake it?" The answer to both questions was "Yes."

Without losing a moment's time David and his six hundred started in pursuit. Two hundred of them, however, were too exhausted to keep up the pace he set. These were, therefore, left behind at the brook Besor to guard the baggage. The remaining four hundred hurried on.

By good fortune they stumbled on a half starved Egyptian slave lad in the wilderness. The boy had fallen sick on the march three days previously, and had been heartlessly abandoned by his Amalekite owner. Some food and drink made him willing to tell all he knew. He proceeded to guide the Hebrews to the camp of the enemy. By surprising them in the midst of a drunken celebration, David and his men were enabled to slaughter all the Amalekites except four hundred young men. Only their swift camels saved these few. The

victorious Hebrews received their wives and children back again. Laden with booty they turned homeward.

David had occasion to make an important ruling on the way back. Some of the greedier members of his band suggested that the two hundred men who had stayed at the brook Besor be given none of the rescued spoil. David indignantly vetoed the proposal, saying,

> "As is the share of him who goes down into the battle,
> So is the share of him who remains by the baggage."

Worded as it is in the parallel form characteristic of Hebrew poetry, this rule would easily be remembered. It was to meet just such definite emergencies as this that Hebrew laws gradually came into being.

Arrived at Ziklag, David disposed of his share of the plunder in a way that was both generous and shrewd. He sent liberal gifts to the elders of Hebron and the adjacent cities of Judah, as well as to the other clans in the south country. In so doing he went far toward winning to his side the influential men of that region. The wisdom of his action was demonstrated later when the men of Hebron elected him king.

David's Return to Judah.—As we have already seen, the tragic outcome of the battle of Mount Gilboa caused David real grief. Nevertheless the death of Saul and Jonathan saved him from an extremely trying situation. At Ziklag he was constantly under the eye of Achish. Any moment his

double dealing might be revealed. With Saul gone there was nothing to hinder his return to Judah. The fact that he had always been loyal to the dead king was in his favor. He could count on a warm welcome.

True to his custom, he sought Jehovah's direction before going. "Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?" he asked. "Go up," was the answer. "Whither shall I go up?" "To Hebron." So to Hebron he went. With him went his followers and their families. The period of exile and probation was over at last. Before the outlaw chief stretched the pleasing prospect of a position of leadership in his own beloved land and among his own people.

Biblical passages: I Samuel 23 to 27; 29; 30.

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Hebron, David's First Capital, Seen from Hills of the South-east

CHAPTER VII

DAVID, KING OF THE HEBREWS

Two Rival Kingdoms.—Not long after David's return to Hebron, the leaders of Judah came to him and made him their king. This action was to be expected. Judah had never been much in love with the house of Saul. None of the surviving members of that family possessed any real gifts of leadership. David, on the contrary, had exhibited during his period of testing those qualities of courage, resourcefulness, tact and wisdom which ideally fitted him for the difficult task before him. In addition to this, the fact that he was their neighbor from Bethlehem strongly appealed to the elders of Judah. To him, therefore, they entrusted the fortunes of the state. Their faith in his ability and integrity was absolute.

Nor was their confidence misplaced. David's political shrewdness was immediately shown in his attitude toward the Philistines. Instead of rashly breaking with them, he seems to have decided on the wiser course of ruling for a time as their vassal. A period of freedom from foreign aggression was sorely needed by Israel. There would be time enough to strike for independence when the kingdom had been thoroughly organized and its resources developed.

Meanwhile a rival kingdom was being set up in the north at Mahanaim in the east-Jordan land. Abner, the capable commander of the northern armies, had placed Saul's youngest son, Ishbaal,[1] on the throne. This weakling was a mere puppet in Abner's hands. Apparently Ishbaal, like David, found it advisable to pay tribute as vassal to the Philistines.

David placed at the head of the forces his able and outspoken nephew, Joab. Between Joab and Abner, his rival in the north, a jealous feud quickly broke out. The result was shortly to plunge the two Hebrew kingdoms into civil war. No interference to this internal strife was offered by the Philistine overlords. Doubtless they were highly pleased; for the more their troublesome vassals weakened one another, the less danger of rebellion there would be.

Battle of Gibeon.—Of the various battles fought in this war, the Biblical historian chooses to tell us in some detail about the one at Gibeon. As Gibeon lay in Benjamin and, consequently, in Ishbaal's territory, it would seem that David's army was taking the offensive in an invasion of the north. Joab and Abner personally led the opposing armies. Between the hostile camps lay the great reservoir which is still to be seen at Gibeon.

At Abner's suggestion the battle began with a tournament between twelve picked champions from

[1] Later generations learned to hate the heathenish sound of the word Baal, and therefore changed his name to Ishbosheth, 'man of shame.'

each side. The two bands met in full view of the armies. Each of the warriors forthwith caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword into his side. So quick and fierce was the onslaught that every one of the twenty-four fell dead on the spot. This first contest, therefore, decided nothing. The fighting then became general. Joab ultimately put Abner to flight.

In the rout that followed, an incident occurred which was destined to have serious after-affects. Joab's brothers, Abishai and Asahel, were leading in the chase after the vanquished foe. Asahel, apparently the youngest, was as fleet of foot as a gazelle. Picking out Abner he followed until he had almost overtaken him. Abner, looking back, recognized his pursuer. He realized that his experience and skill would easily give him victory in a fight with the youthful Asahel. But he was loath to kill the young man, and thus enter into the deadly blood feud with Joab that would surely follow. Twice, therefore, he urged him to go away. "Turn aside from following me," he begged. "Why should I smite you to the ground?" Asahel refused to listen. There was no help for it. Abner turned about and flung his spear with so much power that it passed clear through Asahel's body and out at the back. The young man fell dead in the road. Despite the fact that Abner had acted most unwillingly and in self-defense, and that this incident happened in open warfare, the ancient law of blood revenge inexorably demanded life for life.

Joab and Abishai continued to follow Abner. Just as the sun was setting Abner halted on a hilltop and, in desperation, formed his men in battle array. When Joab came up, Abner called for quarter. "Must the sword devour forever?" he cried. "Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be before you bid the people cease pursuing their kinsmen?" Moved by the appeal to their common blood, Joab called off his soldiers. Then, after halting at Bethlehem to perform the sad duty of burying his brother, he hurried back to Hebron. Abner and his force, meanwhile, made a forced night march through the torrid Jordan valley, and reached Mahanaim the following day.

The losses in this particular contest were most unequal. Three hundred and sixty of Abner's soldiers fell; Joab lost only nineteen beside Asahel. The war continued in a series of battles and raids. Concerning the results we are informed that "David grew stronger and stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker." The way was thus gradually being prepared for David to mount the throne of a united kingdom.

Abner's Quarrel with Ishbaal.—During this period of the wars with Judah, Abner grew more and more overbearing toward his royal master. This led at last to a quarrel between them, the final outcome of which was to add the kingdom of Ishbaal to David's realm. The dispute arose over a concubine of Saul named Rizpah. According to Semitic custom, Ishbaal had inherited his father's

wives along with the rest of the estate. But Abner boldly took to himself this particular member of the harem.

Weakling though he was, Ishbaal protested against this trespass upon his rights. "Why did you go in to my father's concubine?" he demanded. Abner was in no mood to accept reproof from his tool. "Am I a dog's head?" he retorted. "I, who keep showing kindness to the house of Saul, that you should now find fault with me about a woman? I swear I will transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba." To this taunt and threat of revolt Ishbaal dared make no reply.

Abner's threat was more than idle bluster. He could do what he said. He seems to have tired of the unequal struggle against David, and was, therefore, in a mood to welcome any pretext whatsoever for breaking with his flabby lord. The quarrel over Rizpah had furnished him the opening he was seeking. At once he sent messengers to David with the promise to bring all the northern kingdom over to him, provided a satisfactory agreement could be reached.

But David was in no particular hurry to strike a bargain. "You shall not see my face," he replied, "unless you bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see me." At the same time he sent Ishbaal the peremptory order, "Give me my wife Michal."

The frightened Ishbaal took Michal away from

her husband Paltiel, and entrusted to Abner the duty of conducting her to David. The fact that this meant the breaking up of a home seems to have been a matter of slight concern to anybody. Paltiel's deep affection for his wife is shown by the fact that he continued to follow her, weeping, until Abner brutally said, "Go, return." For Michal herself, it could hardly have been a happy journey.

Whether Ishbaal had any suspicion that Abner would really carry out his threat to go over to David, is not made clear. Even before leaving for Hebron, Abner conspired with some of the leaders in Israel to turn the kingdom over to David. Consequently, when he and his twenty men reached Judah, an understanding was speedily reached. What the conditions were is not told in detail. Doubtless Abner was to get a liberal reward for his services including, perhaps, Joab's position as commander-in-chief of the army. David may also have promised to see to it that Joab dropped his blood feud with Abner. What is certain is that the king definitely plotted to take Ishbaal's kingdom away from him. At the parting feast held to ratify the agreement, Abner summarized matters in these words, "I will go and gather all Israel to my lord the king, and they will make a covenant with you, and you will rule over all which you desire."

Murder of Abner.—Hardly had Abner left Hebron on his way to fulfil his part of the agreement, when Joab and his troops returned unex-

pectedly from a successful raid. Joab was indignant when he learned that David had been dealing with the enemy. In no uncertain terms he denounced the king for harboring a spy. "What have you done?" he cried. "Why did you let him go? Do you not know that Abner came to deceive you?" That David should have so far forgotten the sacred duty of blood-revenge as to entertain the slayer of his nephew, Asahel, seemed to him incredible. Nor could he help believing that Abner was at heart hostile to the king. Incidentally, too, he might prove a dangerous rival to Joab at court!

Emerging from this interview Joab straightway, without David's knowledge, sent messengers to bring Abner back. Abner supposed that the king wanted to discuss some point more fully and, therefore, willingly returned. But he got no farther than the city gate. There Joab met him and took him aside as if for a quiet conversation. Suddenly he stabbed him to death. It seems strange that Abner should have suspected nothing.

When David was informed of the treacherous deed of his kinsman, he promptly protested his own innocence. In emphatic language he prayed that the guilt of Abner's death might be visited upon Joab and his descendants in the shape of loathsome diseases, effeminacy, defeat in battle and famine. It is to be noticed, however, that he did not dare to punish him. Joab was too powerful and valuable a man to lose or to offend seriously. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the people would have permitted David to discipline him simply for

carrying out what seemed to them the pious duty of blood-revenge.

Nevertheless, everything possible was done to honor the memory of the slain man. David issued to Joab and the people the command, "Rend your clothes, and put on sackcloth, and mourn before Abner!" He himself followed the bier as they carried it to a grave in Hebron. He also composed the dirge,

> "Should Abner die as dies the fool?
> Thy hands were not bound,
> Nor were thy feet in fetters;
> As one falls before ruthless men thou didst fall."

It was a worthy tribute to a brave man treacherously done to death. Nor did David's expression of grief end here. He refused to touch food until sunset when, according to Hebrew custom, the new day begins. "Do you not know," he questioned his attendants, "that a prince and a great man has fallen today in Israel? And I am weak this day, though anointed king. May Jehovah reward the evil-doer according to his wickedness."

These sincere expressions of grief created a favorable impression upon the minds of the citizens of the northern kingdom. It became evident that the king had had no part in the murder. No one could doubt for a moment that he deeply regretted Joab's deed. David had been sincerely grateful to Abner for his proffered help in winning the northern kingdom to his side. Joab's rashness now seemed to have destroyed forever any chance

of establishing a united kingdom under David. Thus, not only the motive of gratitude to the dead, but also every prompting of self-interest, combined to intensify David's longing that Jehovah might rid him of Joab, his too-powerful general and relative.

Assassination of Ishbaal.—The death of Abner threw the court at Mahanaim into utter consternation. He had been the chief prop of the throne. With him gone, Ishbaal's lack of capacity became very apparent. Two soldiers of fortune, thinking to receive thanks and a substantial reward from David, determined to kill the king. One noon, while Ishbaal was taking his rest, they came to the palace. They found a portress at the door, busily cleaning wheat. Watching their opportunity, they slipped in when she became drowsy and slept. In a moment's time they had killed the sleeping king, cut off his head, and escaped. All the night they journeyed through the Jordan valley and thence to Hebron, bearing their gruesome trophy.

At David's court, however, an unpleasant surprise awaited them. "Behold the head of Ishbaal, the son of Saul, your enemy!" they announced. But the expected reward was not forthcoming. On the contrary, David described to them how he had previously slain the person who brought news of Saul's death. "How much more," he exclaimed, "when wicked men have slain a righteous man in his own house upon his bed shall I not require his blood at your hand?" He had his young men slay the murderers and cut off their hands and feet. These

were hung up beside the pool at Hebron as an eloquent warning to others who might be tempted to similar crimes of violence. Ishbaal's head was decently buried in the tomb of Abner, his general and relative.

David King Over All Israel.—The march of events had made David the inevitable candidate for the throne of a united kingdom. There was no strong descendant of the house of Saul to dispute his claim. Meribbaal, Jonathan's son, had been dropped by his nurse in the frantic flight after the battle of Gilboa, and had been so crippled thereby as to be unfit to rule. David himself had made a favorable impression on the northern leaders by his fairness toward Saul and his descendants. His tact and generosity had won him many friends. Above all, the encroachments of the Philistines demanded just such a resolute and capable leader as he had proved himself to be. He was the man of the hour.

Considerable time must have elapsed between the death of Ishbaal and the actual coming of David into his own. Fierce and independent by nature and tradition alike, the Israelite chieftains hesitated long before accepting a king from Judah. Both diplomacy and compulsion were doubtless employed by David to hasten their decision. The conclusion of it all was that the elders of Israel finally came to David at Hebron and anointed him king. On this occasion he made a formal convenant with them, protecting the liberties of the individual tribes.

At this time David was thirty-seven years old. He had already been king over Judah for seven years and six months. He was to rule over the united kingdom for thirty-three years. From a humble country lad he had risen by his own energy and prowess to the highest place in the land. But he himself would have been the first to confess that he could never have achieved what he did had it had not been for the constant and timely aid of a beneficent guiding providence.

Biblical passage: II Samuel 2 to 4.

CHAPTER VIII

DAVID AS LIBERATOR AND ORGANIZER

As ruler of all Israel David faced an extremely difficult task—that of freeing the nation from the strangle-hold of the powerful Philistines. In order to accomplish this it was not enough that he himself should be a leader of approved skill and valor. He must have a united following behind him. But this is exactly what was lacking. No sense of real and abiding unity had yet been born in the nation. Many of the native Canaanite groups had never been more than half assimilated into the common stock. The various Hebrew tribes were still intensely jealous and suspicious of one another. Right through the land from east to west ran a distinct line of cleavage that had existed ever since the conquest. There was a North and there was a South. Before David could take even the first step toward shattering the Philistine yoke it was essential that he should secure greater unity and harmony within the Hebrew nation itself.

Jerusalem Made Capital.—In seeking to unify the combined kingdoms, David had to decide this important question: What city shall be chosen as capital? If he continued to rule from Hebron, the distant capital of Judah, the northern tribes would

1 Correct sp. Capital

feel aggrieved. On the other hand, Judah might take it as a slight should he transfer the court to one of the cities of Israel. Some neutral place must be found.

It was a brilliant idea on David's part that led him to select Jerusalem as his royal city. This strategic town lay midway between Hebron, Judah's capital, and Shechem, capital of the leading northern tribe of Ephraim. As it had never been taken by the Hebrews but still remained in the hands of the native Jebusites, no local associations clustered about it either for the North or for the South. From the days of the famous Amarna tablets in the fourteenth century B.C. it had been renowned as a mighty stronghold. Its natural ramparts of inaccessible rock cliffs, reinforced by stone walls and a citadel, made it an ideal place to defend.

But before David could use it as his capital, he had to solve the difficult problem of taking it away from its Jebusite possessors. They laughed at him when he began siege operations. The lame and the blind, they jeered, could repulse any attack he might launch. By clever strategy, however, he succeeded in capturing the fortress. With its fall the last of the Canaanite cities came under Hebrew sway. The eastern hill, where the citadel stood, was renamed 'City of David.'

Had this stronghold, situated as it was in the very center of the land, remained in Jebusite hands, it would without fail have caused David a great deal of trouble. But coming as it did under Hebrew rule, its central location made it the best possible

seat for the royal residence. David and his successors considerably strengthened its defenses. During the twenty-nine centuries that have passed since his time it has never ceased to play an important rôle in the unfolding drama of Hebrew and world history.

Transfer of the Ark.—To his new capital David determined to bring the ark of God. It will be remembered that the Philistines, terrified by the plagues that trailed after this sacred chest, had in desperation returned it to its own land. During the intervening years it had reposed, almost forgotten, at Kirjath-jearim. David, moved by characteristic religious zeal, determined to save it from neglect.

Having gathered a large group of musicians and citizens, he went down to bring it to Jerusalem. According to the custom of the times, it was placed on a new, unpolluted cart. Singing and playing upon musical instruments, David and his company danced in the joyous frenzy of the usual religious celebrations as the oxen slowly dragged the ark toward Jerusalem.

But a mysterious accident put an end to the happiness of the occasion. The procession was nearing Jerusalem when the oxen stumbled in the road. It seemed that the ark would fall. To prevent this, Uzzah, one of the attendants, impulsively put out his hand and steadied it. He was struck dead on the spot. This was understood by the bystanders as Jehovah's punishment upon him for his irreverence in touching the holy object. The Hebrews still thought of their God as a somewhat

arbitrary and irresponsible being. It was only much later that the prophets succeeded in persuading them that Jehovah was altogether righteous, just and loving. So far as the fact of Uzzah's death is concerned, modern psychology teaches us that, believing what he did about Jehovah, his own terror at his rash act may easily have caused his death.

Naturally enough, David was both frightened and angry at the unfortunate outcome of his well-meant efforts to please Jehovah. It seemed to him that the action of the Deity had been both incomprehensible and unfair. He did not now dare to bring the ark into Jerusalem. So it was carried aside into the house of Obed-Edom, a Philistine soldier in the service of the court.

For three months the ark remained in the Philistine home. Then someone came to David saying, "Jehovah has blessed the household of Obed-Edom because of the ark of God." Apparently Jehovah's anger was appeased. The king, therefore, decided to make another effort to move this sacred object, now become the bringer of good fortune, to the palace.

Once more the sacred procession formed and started. This time the ark was carried on men's shoulders. When the bearers had advanced six paces, David offered an ox and a fatling as a sacrifice of joy and thanksgiving. Then, clad only in the scanty linen garment of the priests, he whirled and danced enthusiastically before the ark as it moved onward. As the ark entered the citadel it

was greeted by happy shouts and the blare of trumpets. They placed the holy chest under the tent previously pitched for it. With his own hands the king offered generous sacrifices. Then he blessed the people, and sent them home laden with provisions for a feast.

It is in connection with this incident that we get a hint of Michal's feeling toward David. Looking out through her lattice, she was scandalized at her husband's behavior as he danced at the head of the procession. Her own father, Saul, had on at least one occasion, under the power of a similar religious experience, lain down naked a whole day and night; but apparently David's conduct was even more unconventional. She met him as he returned to the house with the sarcastic jibe, "How glorious was the king of Israel today as he uncovered himself to the eyes of his servant's maids, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly exposes himself!" These words reveal the bitterness that had festered in her heart ever since David had forced her to leave Paltiel to return to him. Nor did David trouble himself to soothe her anger. He reminded her that Jehovah had raised him to the kingship over the heads of her father's family. Then he asserted that he would act even more shamelessly in the future. We do not know that David and Michal ever became reconciled after this misunderstanding.

The presence of the ark in Jerusalem meant much for the security of David's throne. The people appreciated his devotion to this ancient symbol of

Jehovah's personal presence. Gathered about it were some of Israel's most sacred memories. Now that it was in the new capital, it served to focus there the patriotism and religious devotion of the whole nation. Especially would the northern tribes be enthusiastic over David's care for this treasure. In former times they had zealously guarded it at Shiloh, the religious center of Ephraim.

Liberation from Philistine Domination.—So long as David had been content to rule as a minor kinglet at Hebron, the Philistines felt no desire to interfere with him. All that they required was that he pay tribute as a loyal vassal should. But his anointing as king over a united Israel aroused their suspicions. His further action in capturing the stronghold of Jerusalem and strengthening its defenses, confirmed their fears. They decided that he had become too strong to be safe.

Without waiting, therefore, for any formal declaration of rebellion, the Philistines speedily set their armies in motion against their vassal. Unopposed they marched straight up into the central highlands. In the valley of Rephaim, southwest of Jerusalem, they made camp. Their idols accompanied them to lend them aid.

David and his men were unprepared for this sudden attack. So they wisely retreated to the stronghold of Adullam. Here the king rallied his scattered forces about him. When he had enough men, he sought direction from Jehovah. In reply to his questions, the oracle gave the definite command and assurance, "Go up; for I will certainly deliver

the Philistines into your power." Thus encouraged, David's soldiers were irresistible. They broke the Philistine army into pieces. In their panic the enemy left even their gods behind them for David's men to capture.

After a short breathing spell, the Philistine armies again came and spread themselves abroad in the valley of Rephaim. Upon inquiry the oracle directed David to get in the rear of the enemy, and attack only when he heard the sound of marching in the tops of the sacred balsam trees. As soon as the sound was heard, David advanced. The battle resulted in a victory for the Hebrews that was even more decisive than the former one had been. The Philistines did not pause in their frantic flight until they had reached their own city of Gezer. By means of these triumphs and others like them, the king secured that complete liberation from Philistine tyranny for which Saul had so courageously but vainly fought.

David's mighty heroes performed many a deed of valor in the course of these contests. Fighting often single-handed and alone, they slew giants and laid low many of the enemy. On one occasion Abishai saved David from what seemed certain death at the hands of a Philistine giant. A notable incident occurred during the period of David's stay at Adullam. His beloved Bethlehem was being held by a Philistine garrison. Overcome by longing he sighed, "Oh, that someone would bring me water from the well of Bethlehem!" Three of his heroes heard him speak. They straightway went

to Bethlehem, broke through the enemy's lines, and brought the desired water to their leader. David could not bear to drink water for which his friends had risked their lives. With real nobility of feeling he poured it out on the ground as a worthy offering to Jehovah.

Wars of Conquest.—As a result of repeated defeats, the Philistines at length decided to keep to their own fertile coast-plains and leave the hill country to the Hebrews. The Phœnicians to the north manifested great friendliness toward the Hebrews. In fact, Hiram of Tyre later became David's closest ally, and supplied skilled workmen for his building projects. The Israelites had thus no occasion to fear any attack from the direction of the sea.

In every other quarter, however, David was hemmed in by foes. To the south of Judah, and on the east of the Jordan, were settled a number of kingdoms that had always shown themselves hostile. Unless these were brought to terms, there could be no permanent feeling of security. First of all, David took the offensive in a campaign against Moab. In this he was successful. His prisoners he forced to lie down in rows on the ground. Two out of every three rows he put to death. Inasmuch as all the nations settled in Palestine deemed it a very laudable act in time of war to devote even whole cities to death in honor of their gods, we must not condemn David too strongly for his stern deed. Those Moabites who were permitted to live were made to pay heavy tribute. Edom was dealt with

even more severely than Moab. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Edom and Moab became in later centuries the bitterest of Judah's persecutors.

David tried at first to make the Ammonites his friends. Learning that King Nahash was dead and that his son Hanun had succeeded him, he said, "I will show kindness to Hanun as his father showed kindness to me." So he sent ambassadors to convey his sympathy to Hanun in his bereavement. Upon the arrival of these messengers, however, the Ammonite princes expressed their belief that David had sent them as spies. Hanun, with perverted humor, shaved off half of each ambassador's beard, and cut off their robes up to the hips. Thus he sent them back, ashamed and angry.

King David was hardly the man to accept such an insult calmly. First sending word to his humiliated messengers to remain at Jericho until their beards were grown, he dispatched the army under Joab and Abishai to avenge the wrong done. The Ammonites, realizing their peril, hired the Syrians to help them. Joab headed one division of the army against these Syrians; Abishai led the other against the Ammonites. Hard fighting gave them a victory over the Syrians, which resulted finally in a treaty of peace. The Ammonites, seeing their allies defeated and in flight, sought refuge in Rabbah, their capital. Here Joab besieged them. Having taken the fortress which protected their water supply, he sent for David. The king arrived in time to lead the final assault and capture the city itself. Rich booty rewarded his efforts.

The chief item in the spoil was a magnificent jewelled crown of gold, weighing one hundred and thirty pounds, which he took from the head of their god Milcom. As with Moab and Edom, so here the customary cruel punishments were inflicted upon the unfortunate inhabitants.

Through a series of such wars David gradually subdued eastern and southern Palestine. From snow-clad Hermon in the north to the hot and barren reaches that border Egypt on the south, his authority was firmly established. His realm measured seventy to a hundred miles in breadth and about two hundred miles in length. Its area was slightly greater than that of the state of Vermont. Although this may seem to us a very small kingdom, it should be remembered that its situation on the corridor between Asia and Africa lent it considerable importance. The tribes were now united and masterful citizens of a new world of broad horizons. Jerusalem was a busy center of national life and international relations. Officials, visitors, priests, merchants, soldiers, ambassadors, all thronged its streets.

Organization of the Kingdom.—In the organization of his court, David made a decided advance over his predecessor Saul. No longer did the king rule like a local chief. A large staff of officials was appointed to take charge of the various departments of the government. While David himself continued to act as chief justice, to whom all could appeal as a last resort, the majority of cases were settled by his subordinates. The army was more highly spe-

cialized and developed. At the royal headquarters in Jerusalem were to be found secretaries, priests, generals and, significantly, an overseer of forced labor. Alliances made with neighboring states were cemented by marriages, so that David's harem became quite large. Israel came to be an important center and distributing point for the commerce and traffic carried on between the lands of the Near East.

Intense labor and hard fighting, coupled with innate genius, had brought the great king to the zenith of his career. It is to this period that Hebrews of later days looked back wistfully as to their golden age. The prophets and psalmists of Judah's decline modeled their aspirations for the future on the pattern of David's glorious kingdom. Even the longed-for Messiah was often pictured as simply an enlarged reflection of David.

Biblical passages: II Samuel 5; 6; 8:15-18; 10; 12:26-31; 20:23-26; 21:15-22; 23:8-22.

CHAPTER IX

DAVID'S SORDID SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The wealth and luxury of the East came pouring into David's expanded kingdom. Under their influence the high moral standards of earlier and simpler days began to relax. All classes were affected, but the rulers and rich degenerated most rapidly. David's own moral fiber, always so firm in adversity, grew somewhat flabby under the influence of prosperity. The atmosphere of his home, besides, was morally unhealthy. At all times the large oriental harems have been hotbeds of intrigue, jealousy and surrender to the lure of pleasure. The result of these combined influences was so to weaken the noble king that he became unable to offer effective resistance to any strong temptation that might come. Consequently, at the very summit of his great career, he fell.

David's Double Crime.—It was while Joab was still besieging the Ammonite city of Rabbah that David committed a flagrant sin which was destined to have a long train of evil consequences. One evening as he walked on the roof of the palace, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. Upon inquiry he learned that her name was Bathsheba, and that she was the wife of Uriah, a hired soldier in Joab's

army. He sent for her, and they committed adultery together.

After seeking vainly to conceal his transgression, David resolved to put Bathsheba's husband out of the way and make her his wife. So he sent Joab a letter by Uriah's own hand. "Place Uriah in the forefront of the heaviest fighting," it ran, "then retreat from behind him so that he may be smitten and die." Joab obeyed orders. In the course of a skirmish with the inhabitants of Rabbah, Uriah and several companions were led close up to the city walls, where the archers easily shot them down. A swift messenger was dispatched to David with the news. David thus added the sin of murder to that of adultery.

After Bathsheba had observed the conventional period of mourning for her murdered husband, the king married her. She became the favorite and most influential member of David's harem. Sometime after the marriage she bore a son.

Nathan's Rebuke.—Such crimes of murder and adultery are not at all uncommon under oriental monarchs. The surprising feature in this case is that one of David's subjects, the prophet Nathan, reproved him and yet escaped with his life. Nathan approached the subject by means of a parable about a ewe lamb. "There were two men in one city," he said, "one rich, the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he had bought. And he fed it, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his own

morsel and drink of his own cup and lie in his bosom; and it was to him like a daughter. But there came a traveller to the rich man; and he refrained from taking of his own flock and his own herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him. Instead he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it."

David was furiously angry at the meanness of this alleged rich man. "As Jehovah lives," he cried, "the man that did this deserves death. He shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing and because he had no pity." Nathan abruptly turned on David and said, "You are the man." Then he pointed out how Jehovah had exalted him to the kingship and given him a large household. In spite of this, he had murdered Uriah in order to steal his wife. The prophet predicted terrible punishment, beginning first of all with the death of Bathsheba's child.

Shocked by the realization of his crimes, David penitently sought forgiveness of Jehovah and prayed earnestly that the life of the little child might be spared. His prayer was not answered—the child died. But he could not bring himself to put away Bathsheba. She continued to rule his home and court.

Amnon's Crime and Absalom's Revenge.—Amnon, David's oldest son, was more ready to imitate his father's sins than his virtues. Conceiving a mad passion for his comely half-sister Tamar, he managed, by feigning illness, to trick her into taking care of him. Then he brutally assaulted her

and cast her out-of-doors. Her own brother Absalom comforted the heartbroken girl and took her into his house.

When David learned of the shameful deed of Amnon he was very angry. But for some reason he did nothing. We are not aware that he so much as reproved or warned the criminal. Absalom, however, was not disposed to forget the wrong done his sister. Concealing for the time being the hate he bore Amnon, he tirelessly watched and waited for a chance to secure revenge.

Thus two whole years passed by. Then Absalom invited the king and all his attendants to a great sheep-shearing feast in a village some twenty miles north of Jerusalem. When David excused himself Absalom said, "If not, then let my brother Amnon go with us." At first the king seemed to suspect that something was amiss. But after some urging he gave permission for Amnon and the rest of the princes to attend the feast.

Absalom laid his plans for vengeance with great care. "When Amnon's heart is merry with wine," he instructed his servants, "and I say to you, 'Strike down Amnon,' then kill him." At the signal the men fell upon Amnon and slew him. The rest of the princes hastened terrified from the scene as fast as the mules could carry them.

Sorrow reigned in the royal palace that night. David and his whole household wept disconsolately over the death of the oldest son. Absalom escaped punishment by fleeing to the king of Geshur in northeastern Palestine. There he remained three

years. During this time the king's grief over the loss of Amnon gradually grew less keen, and he began to long for the return of his exiled son. But his pride would not permit him to send for him.

Return of Absalom.—Joab, perceiving David's desire, resorted to a stratagem in order to secure the return of Absalom. He sent to Tekoa for a certain wise woman, one of the class which was later to become so influential among Israel's teachers. Upon her arrival, Joab proposed to her a scheme by means of which he hoped to secure Absalom's pardon, and permission for him to come back. The plan was similar to that of Nathan when he used the parable of the ewe lamb.

Clad in the garb of a mourner, the woman prostrated herself before the king. "Verily I am a widow," she asserted, "and my husband is dead. I had two sons, and they quarreled in the field when there was no one to part them. One smote the other and killed him. And now the whole clan is risen up against me and they say, 'Deliver up the one that slew his brother, so that we may kill him for the life of his brother whom he slew and so destroy the heir also.' Thus will they leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth."

David's warm heart responded at once to this piteous appeal. "By the life of Jehovah," he swore, "not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground." He had committed himself! The woman thereupon cast aside all pretense. She declared that David was wronging the nation in continuing to

punish Absalom. Mercy and forgiveness ought to be shown toward his own son no less than to the children of others. Amnon was dead in any case, and no harshness toward his slayer would restore him to life. Why not permit Absalom to come back?

By this time David suspected who was behind the plot. He asked the woman, "Was the hand of Joab with you in all this?" She admitted the fact. The king was not at all displeased, for he, too, wanted his son back. Joab had apparently been standing beside him during the whole interview. Turning to him he said, "Go, bring the young man Absalom back." So Joab journeyed to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem.

But the young prince was not restored to his old position. By David's command he lived apart in his own house, and was not permitted to see his father's face. After two years, growing weary of this impossible state of affairs, he sent for Joab. Twice Joab ignored the summons. The third time Absalom sent his servants to set fire to Joab's field of barley. This brought results. Joab speedily appeared demanding, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" "Let me see the king's face," replied Absalom, "and if there be guilt in me, let him kill me." The result of Joab's intercession was that David sent for his son, and with a kiss restored him to favor.

Absalom's Rebellion.—After his restoration Absalom seems to have taken it for granted that he was to be the next king. He secured a chariot and

horses and engaged fifty men to run before him. Only the heir apparent would have assumed such unusual state or maintained so large a bodyguard.

To wait for his father's death, however, was no part of his plan. The memory of his years of disgrace embittered his soul and filled him with hate for David. So he began to carry out a scheme which he had doubtless formed in exile. He set himself definitely to the task of usurping the throne. This was comparatively easy, because David seems to have retired more and more from public life, thus losing vital touch with his subjects.

Using all the wiles of a skilful demagogue, the handsome young prince proceeded to sow discontent among the people. Early each morning he took his stand at the city gate. When anyone came with a case for the king to decide, he entered into friendly conversation with him. "From what city are you?" he would begin. Flattered by his apparent interest, the man usually told all about himself and his difficulties. "Your claims are clearly good and just," Absalom would respond, "but no man has been appointed by the king to hear you. O that someone would make me judge in the land, so that every man that had a suit or a cause might come to me for justice!" In this way he managed to steal away from his father the loyalty of many in Israel.

At the end of four years of such plotting, Absalom decided that the time had come to strike. Under pretense of paying a vow to Jehovah, he secured David's permission to go to Hebron. With him he took some two hundred court officials, who

knew nothing of his plot. No sooner had he reached Hebron than he sent secret messengers throughout the land with the summons, "When you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say: 'Absalom is king in Hebron.' "

The signal was given and the revolt broke out. Its flames spread most rapidly in David's own tribe of Judah. Ahitophel of Giloh, David's trusted counselor, became Absalom's lieutenant and chief adviser. Thanks to their strength and careful preparation, the rebels soon had the whole nation in turmoil. Absalom quickly gathered a considerable body of troops about him.

Flight of David—Taken by surprise and totally unprepared, David could do nothing but flee before the advancing army of Absalom. He could not trust himself to the loyalty of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Attended only by a few of his court officers, and protected by two companies of hired soldiers, he hastily left the city. Toward the east-Jordan city of Mahanaim, formerly the capital of the rival kingdom of Ishbaal, he directed his steps. Here he could count on the gratitude of a people to whom he had brought peace and safety by his conquest of their hostile neighbors.

In the hour of his humiliating flight the king showed some of his innate nobility of spirit. He generously urged Ittai of Gath, the newly recruited Philistine captain of his bodyguard, to go back and join Absalom, rather than share the perils of flight. But the foreign soldier loyally refused to desert him. David's attitude toward the ark of God also

showed his greatness. His reverence for the visible pledge of Jehovah's presence was such that he refused to remove it from its proper place in Jerusalem. He ordered the priests who were carrying it to return to the city and remain there to care for it.

Weeping, with head covered and feet bare in token of his grief, the king headed the mournful procession of his followers down into the Kidron valley and up the slope of the Mount of Olives. At the summit his friend Hushai met him. To him David proposed a plan by which he might be kept informed of the movements of the enemy. The arrangement was that Hushai should return to Jerusalem and there pretend loyal allegiance to the new king. As he found opportunity he was to send bulletins to David concerning the progress of events. Ahimaaz and Jonathan, the sons of the priests who cared for the ark, were to act as messengers. Accordingly Hushai went back to Jerusalem as the place where he could best serve his king.

David and his followers continued on their way. A little past the summit of the Mount of Olives they were met by a certain Ziba. This man was the servant of Meribbaal, the crippled son of Jonathan whom David had made a member of his own household. Ziba brought with him as presents a pair of asses and generous supplies of food. When asked by David why his master was not with him, he claimed that Meribbaal had deserted to Absalom with the hope of regaining his father's kingdom. Impulsively and without investigation

the king said, "Behold, all is now yours that belonged to Meribbaal."

At the village of Bahurim, Shimei, a relative of Saul, came out and cursed the fleeing monarch. He further showed his contempt by throwing stones and dirt upon the royal party as it passed along. To David he shouted, "Go, go, bloody and vile man! Jehovah has brought back on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead you have reigned. Jehovah has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. Behold you now in your calamity! For you are a bloody man."

The fellow's insolence enraged Abishai, David's daring and devoted nephew. In true oriental style he reviled the reviler. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" he cried. "Let me go over and take off his head." But the king was too exhausted and discouraged to care what Shimei said. "Let him curse," he said, "for Jehovah has bidden him."

So the miserable caravan crawled along, with persistent Shimei running along the hillside that paralleled the road, cursing and throwing stones. At last the Jordan was reached. Preparations were soon under way for the night's rest. In this dismal hour, when his fortunes were at their lowest, the king learned how bitter taste the Dead Sea fruits of sin.

Biblical passage: II Samuel 11 to 16

CHAPTER X

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM

Absalom encountered no resistance when he came to take possession of the city from which David had so recently and so ignominiously fled. The inhabitants seemed friendly, or at least indifferent. Upon the advice of his counselor, the wily Ahitophel, the new king publicly took over his father's harem. Thus he proclaimed by deed as well as by word that the break with his father was complete, and that he was now sole ruler over Israel.

Hushai and Ahitophel.—Hushai cleverly acted out the rôle which David had assigned him. His flattering speeches and warm protestations of loyalty to the new king, "whom Jehovah and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen," won him Absalom's full confidence. Could Absalom but have foreseen future events, however, he would have lost little time in disposing of this pretended recruit.

On the very day the new king reached Jerusalem, Hushai found his opportunity to help David. Ahitophel had prudently urged the need for immediate action. "Let me choose twelve thousand men," he advised, "and pursue David this night.

I will come upon him while he is tired and weak, and I will smite the king alone."

But Absalom wanted all possible light. "Call now Hushai also," he commanded, "and let us hear likewise what he has to say." Now Hushai realized, of course, that David needed time to rally his demoralized forces. He, therefore, advised Absalom to await reinforcements. "You know your father and his men," he reminded him, "that they are mighty men and bitterly angry, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field." By further playing upon the young usurper's fears he persuaded him to postpone action until he should have collected a vast and irresistible army, before which David's meager forces could not possibly stand. "The counsel of Hushai is better than that of Ahitophel," chorused Absalom and his generals.

As a matter of fact Ahitophel's advice was much better, and Hushai knew it. Had Absalom pursued the old king at once, he could easily have annihilated his feeble army and thus disposed of all resistance to the new régime. The ease with which Hushai hoodwinked Absalom was to the narrator of these stories a sure indication of the workings of divine providence.

Ahitophel, perceiving that he was thoroughly discredited and certain that delay spelled ruin for Absalom's cause, had no further desire to live. Saddling his ass he departed to his home in Giloh. There he arranged for the distribution of his effects, and then strangled himself. If, as seems probable, he was the grandfather of Bathsheba, we can un-

derstand his bitter despair as he realized the failure of his hopes of revenge upon David, who had brought the stain of adultery upon the family name.

Hushai's Message to David.—After advising Absalom and while he was still uncertain what the final outcome would be, Hushai sent a message to David. "Do not lodge tonight at the fords of the wilderness," he urged, "but by all means cross over, lest the king and all the people with him be swallowed up." The messenger service had been well organized. Hushai gave the instructions to the priests. They relayed it through a slave girl to their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, who were stationed at Enrogel, southeast of the city. It was their task to get the message to David.

As it happened, a lad saw the two as they were starting off. The boy told Absalom, who immediately sent some of his followers in pursuit. Finding themselves hard pressed, the messengers took refuge in the village of Bahurim. A well in the courtyard of a friend's house furnished them a hiding-place. When they had descended into the well, the woman of the house spread the covering over its mouth and strewed fruit upon it as though for drying.

The pursuers came hurrying up. "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" they demanded. "They are gone over the water brook," lied the woman. Off the men started on this false scent. Naturally they found nothing. Wearying at length of the fruitless search, they returned to Jerusalem.

As soon as the coast was clear, the messengers

emerged from the well. They hastened to David and delivered the warning. "Cross quickly over the water," they insisted, "for thus and so has Ahitophel counseled against you." David obeyed. By daybreak next day not a soul remained on the west bank of the Jordan.

The king continued his march to Mahanaim, that ancient center of Hebrew tradition and loyalty. Here he was greeted by various friends who brought with them presents of couches, rugs, bowls and abundant supplies of food. All this was most gratefully received by David and his tired, hungry company.

The Battle.—At Jerusalem, meanwhile, Absalom was hastily gathering more troops for the campaign. The militia of the nation was called to his banners. Amasa, his cousin, was given supreme command. Within a short time the army seemed large enough to justify risking an engagement. Absalom crossed the Jordan and made camp in the land of Gilead.

As soon as it became noised abroad that David was at Mahanaim, loyal adherents rallied to him. Added to the trained warriors of his bodyguard they made up quite a formidable army. This force the king divided into three companies, Joab, Abishai and the Philistine Ittai being placed in command. When David himself desired to accompany the army the people insisted that his life was too valuable to risk in the open field. The upshot of the matter was that he remained in the city, with a body of reserves under his personal command.

While his soldiers were marching forth to battle the king stood beside the city gate and reviewed them. His final instructions to Joab, Abishai and Ittai, given in the hearing of the people, were: "Deal gently for my sake with the lad Absalom."

In the jungle called Ephraim, east of the Jordan and not far from Mahanaim, the decisive battle was fought. The rebel army, lacking the incentive of patriotism, was soon worsted and put to flight. During the rout that ensued, many of the fugitives were slaughtered in the rocky thickets where they sought refuge. In all, twenty thousand of Absalom's men fell that day.

Absalom's Death.—The rebel leader himself met a most peculiar fate. In his retreat his mule passed under the thick, low branches of one of the spreading oak trees which are still to be found in this region. His head caught fast in one of the boughs. The mule passed on, leaving his master suspended in the air. A soldier, seeing him hanging there, reported the fact to Joab. "Why did you not smite him there to the earth?" cried Joab. The man reminded the general of David's charge to take good care of the lad. Joab impatiently answered, "I will not tarry thus with you." Rushing off with a few of his men, he thrust three darts into the heart of Absalom as he was struggling to free himself.

Now that the leader of the insurrection was dead, Joab had no desire for further slaughter. He blew the trumpet to call off pursuit. They

threw Absalom's body into a great pit in the forest. For monument they piled over him a heap of stones. Thus ended the career of a spoiled and headstrong young prince.

David's Grief.—All this time the king had been sitting in the gate of Mahanaim, anxiously awaiting news from the battle. Ahimaaz, one of the two messengers who had brought David Hushai's warning, approached Joab and offered to run with the tidings. At first Joab refused to send him, for he feared lest the king in his grief might do violence to whoever reported Absalom's death. He sought out a less valuable man, a negro slave, and dispatched him by the direct way across the hills. Ahimaaz, however, persisted until he, too, was at length permitted to run. He chose the longer but easier road by way of the Jordan plain.

Ahimaaz outran the negro. Soon the watchman standing on the roof of the city gate of Mahanaim announced his approach to David. A little later, seeing the negro, he called again, "See, another man running alone." "He also is bringing good tidings," replied the king.

"All is well," called Ahimaaz as he drew near. "Is it well with the lad Absalom?" demanded David. Ahimaaz could not bear to tell him the crushing truth. "I saw a great tumult when Joab sent your servant," he cautiously replied, "but I did not learn what it was." David commanded, "Turn aside, stand here." The negro came up. To him the king put his question. The man bluntly answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king,

and all who rise up against you for evil, be as that lad is!"

David's grief was instant and overwhelming. Crushed by his deep personal sorrow, he gave scant thought to the victory so nobly won by his devoted troops. In the room above the city gate he moaned, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!" His sorrow must have been all the more poignant because he realized that his own weakness as a father was partly responsible for the tragedy.

The news of the king's attitude transformed the soldiers' day of victory into one of mourning. Instead of returning with colors flying, they sneaked into the city like men who are ashamed because of having fled in battle. And ever with face covered, the king wept, "O my son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!"

Joab's hard-headed common sense told him that this excess of grief would not do. He roughly warned David that, unless he showed some appreciation of what the people had done and suffered for him, they would all desert. "I know now," he asserted, "that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead this day, then you would be well pleased. Rise, go forth and speak encouragingly to your followers." David knew that Joab was right. He managed to control his grief sufficiently to take his seat in the city gate and fittingly welcome the returning troops.

David's Return.—After their defeat, the followers of Absalom scattered to their homes. The land was soon in utter confusion, now that Absalom was

dead and David was in exile. At length the common people, impatient of this state of affairs, insisted that their rulers should bring back the old king. Hearing of the movement, David sent this message to the elders of his own tribe of Judah: "You are my bone and my flesh. Why then are you the last to bring back the king?" He also promised Amasa, Absalom's general, that he would put him in Joab's place as commander of the army. Thus he meant to accomplish two things: he would punish Joab for killing Absalom, and at the same time bid for the loyalty of the rebels. Amasa was completely won over. As a consequence he used his influence with the Judahites so effectively that with one accord they sent word to David, "Return with all your servants."

So the king started back. The people of Judah went down to the ancient sanctuary of Gilgal, between Jericho and the Jordan, to meet him. Ziba, the former servant of Meribbaal, accompanied by his fifteen sons and twenty servants, waited for him at the river itself. When the royal household arrived, these men helped them through the treacherous waters. Crafty Ziba doubtless took all this trouble in order to prepare the way for the awkward explanations he realized would soon be demanded of him.

Shimei came to make craven apologies. His attitude at this time loses him whatever sympathy we may have entertained for him because of his bold defense of the rights of Saul's house. At sight of the whining fellow, Abishai again sought permission

to kill him. "Should not Shimei be put to death for this," he demanded, "because he cursed the anointed of Jehovah?" But David was inclined toward mercy. "Should anyone be put to death today in Israel?" he asked. Turning to Shimei he assured him, "You shall not die."

Meribbaal was the next to appear before the king. As a sign of mourning he had not dressed his crippled feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, since the day when David fled. "Why did you not go with me, Meribbaal?" sternly demanded the king. Meribbaal explained that he had planned to accompany the king, but that Ziba had deceived him and then basely slandered him to boot. David interrupted with, "Why do you speak any more of your affairs? I say, you and Ziba shall divide the land." Perhaps he suspected that Meribbaal was not telling the whole truth. So he compromised by thus dividing the original estate of Saul between Ziba and his master. This rough-and-ready justice would not seem so strange to an oriental as it does to us.

During his exile at Mahanaim, David had enjoyed the liberal hospitality of an aged and prominent citizen named Barzillai. According to the custom, the host accompanied his guest on the first stage of the journey. When they reached the Jordan, David said, "Come over with me, and I will support you with me in Jerusalem." Barzillai replied, "I am now eighty years old. Can I distinguish between good and bad? Can your servant taste what he eats or drinks? Can I hear any more

the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant still be a burden to my lord, the king?" At his request, however, David gladly agreed to take his son Chimham into the court. So the king kissed the old man and sent him home with his blessing. He himself took Chimham and joined the great company from Israel and Judah which had come to Gilgal in order to bring him on his way to Jerusalem.

Biblical passage: II Samuel 17 to 19.

CHAPTER XI

THE RETURN OF DAVID

The rejoicing over David's homecoming was marred by a revival of the ancient grudge between North and South. In urging Judah to take the lead in inviting him back, the king had unwittingly stirred up the jealousy of the other tribes. This ill will was further increased at the moment of his return by his action in giving Judah the place of honor in escorting him from the Jordan. The resentment of the northern tribes immediately voiced itself in the complaint, "Why have our brothers, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, when *all* of David's men are his people?" "Because," replied the Judahites, "the king is near of kin to us." Israel's retort was a reminder that they numbered ten tribes to their opponents' two. "We have ten shares in the king," they asserted. "Why then did you treat us with contempt? Was not our word first to bring back our king?" Thus the quarrel grew increasingly more bitter. Evidently the men of Judah were more adept than the Israelites in calling names—we are told their words were "fiercer."

Israel really deserved better at David's hand than did Judah. It was Judah that had been foremost in supporting the rebellion of Absalom. When this was quenched, Israel was indeed the first to urge the recall of the king. Apparently David merits some blame for his treatment of the northern tribes on this occasion.

Sheba's Rebellion.—While the king's company was still in the Jordan Valley, the strife among the Hebrews grew into a revolt. Sheba, a nobleman from Benjamin, assuming the lead of the northern Israelites, challenged them to reassert their old independence. He led them in the war-cry,

> "We have no share in David,
> And we have no portion in the son of Jesse!
> Each to his tents, O Israel!"

In response to this call the northern tribes deserted David to rally about the new leader. So fragile were the bonds that united the nation!

The men of Judah, however, remained loyal to their kinsman and brought him in triumph to Jerusalem. Arrived at the capital, David's first task was to stamp out the rebellion. He ordered the new commander, Amasa, to assemble the troops within three days' time. But Amasa possessed neither the experience nor the energy necessary to secure such quick results. So slowly did he move that, at the end of three days, David turned in despair to Abishai. "Now will Sheba do us more harm than did Absalom," he declared. "Take my bodyguard and pursue after him." Abishai will-

ingly set out with the soldiers of the royal guard. With him went the disgraced Joab.

Murder of Amasa.—Gibeon, six miles northwest of Jerusalem, had been reached, when the tardy Amasa met Abishai's band with the troops he had collected. Joab saw his opportunity to get rid of this, his latest rival. He employed much the same sort of treachery to attain his end as in the case of Abner. Concealing an extra sword about his person he advanced toward his unsuspecting victim. "Is it well with you, my brother?" he asked with pretended friendliness. He reached forth his right hand and took Amasa by the beard as if to kiss him. At that moment he struck one blow with his sword into Amasa's body, so that the bowels gushed forth. He was too experienced a killer to require a second stroke. One of his soldiers removed the dying man into a field beside the road and covered him with a garment. Then he stood in the road, and directed all who came up to follow Joab in the pursuit of Sheba.

End of the Rebellion.—From this time on Joab took entire charge. Sheba with his rapidly diminishing band fled to Abel-Beth-Maacah in the extreme north near the sources of the Jordan. The attacking army began the siege of the place. Soon they had raised a mound of earth level with the walls. They were about to put into play the ancient engines for breaching the walls, with whose use Joab and Abishai, veteran leaders of the royal troops, were well acquainted.

Just then a certain wise woman called from the

wall and requested a conference with Joab. When he drew near, she complained, "You seek to destroy a venerable city in Israel." "Not so," he defended himself, "but a man of Ephraim, Sheba by name, has lifted up his hand against King David; only give him up and I will depart from the city." "His head shall be thrown to you over the wall," she promised. She was as good as her word; upon her advice the inhabitants cut off Sheba's head and flung it out to the besiegers as the price of safety. Joab promptly drew off his forces.

Thus had Joab, by quick and ruthless action, put down what might easily have proved a very serious revolt. He had previously stamped out Absalom's rebellion in similar masterly fashion. As a consequence of these feats, his prestige was enormously enhanced. He was looked upon as the savior of the kingdom. With all prominent rivals effectually out of the way, small wonder that Joab became the controlling power behind the throne of failing king David.

The Famine.—Two great national calamities of the reign of David are recorded in the appendix (II Sam. 21-24) of the books of Samuel. It is impossible for us to determine exactly when these events occurred. But the accounts of them are extremely useful in helping us to understand the rather primitive religious beliefs and ideas about God held by David and his subjects.

The first of these misfortunes was a three-year famine caused by drought. Such visitations of providence are not at all uncommon in Palestine—

we hear of them from the earliest times clear down to our own day. According to ancient belief all such calamities were signs of God's displeasure with some definite sin. Hence in the present case the question was anxiously asked: For what sin are we being punished?

Following his invariable custom in times of perplexity, the king inquired of the sacred oracle. "There is blood upon Saul and upon his house," was the reply, "because he slew the Gibeonites." It seems that Saul, out of mistaken zeal for establishing a pure Israelitish race, had tried to exterminate the Canaanite inhabitants of the town of Gibeon. But these people were themselves worshipers of Jehovah and had the additional protection of a sacred treaty with Israel. It was felt that Saul's flagrant violation of this covenant could hardly be overlooked by the Deity in whose name it was made. Moreover, blood-guilt could only be wiped out by the shedding of blood.

David left to the Gibeonites themselves the decision as to the exact form in which Saul's crime should be avenged. "What shall I do for you?" was his query, "and wherewith shall I make atonement?" "Let seven of Saul's descendants be given to us," they demanded, "and we will execute them before Jehovah." The justice of visiting the sins of the fathers upon innocent children seemed to them a matter of course. The idea of limiting the responsibility for sin to the guilty person did not develop until much later. David's reply, as is to be expected, shows that he fully shared the prevail-

ing belief of his day. "I will give them," he said simply.

Two sons of Saul's concubine Rizpah, and five sons of his daughter Merab, were accordingly handed over to the Gibeonites for execution. These seven unlucky victims of a cruelly mistaken idea of God were duly sacrificed to Jehovah at the famous high place of Gibeon. Jonathan's son, Meribbaal, escaped because of the oath of friendship made between his father and the king.

There is one redeeming feature in this unfortunate episode. This is the pathetic loyalty of Rizpah to her slaughtered sons. For months she watched night and day under the Syrian skies over their wasting bodies, protecting them from carrion fowl by day and prowling beasts by night. At length the autumn rains fell, ending the long drought. This was taken as a sign that the Deity was appeased. Then and only then could David reward the fidelity of the woman. From the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead he secured the bones of Saul and Jonathan, which they had rescued from the walls of Bethshan. Together with the seven executed descendants of Saul, these were decently interred in the ancestral sepulchre. The faithfulness of a mother thus secured for her sons the burial which all considered essential for the repose of their spirits in the shadow-land of Sheol. Artists and poets have vied with one another to extol Rizpah's self-effacing love for the children she must have thought accursed of Jehovah.

Census and Plague.—The other national calamity

took the form of a fearful plague. According to the strange story, Jehovah was angry with the people for some unexplained reason. He, therefore, moved David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah." We must remember in this connection that in ancient religions it was considered unlawful for man to inquire too closely into the secrets of the Deity. The number of people in the land is one of these secrets. To take a census, even at Jehovah's specific command, was, therefore, regarded as serious sin.

Later Hebrew writers did not agree with this primitive view. One has only to read the long census lists and the statistics of every sort recorded by the priestly school of writers to see how true this is. The late priestly author of Chronicles, moreover, was puzzled as he read our story in the books of Samuel. He could not conceive of Jehovah tempting a man to sin. He accordingly substituted Satan's name for Jehovah's as the one who "moved David to number Israel." The whole incident, of course, reflects beliefs that stand many centuries behind the more advanced conceptions of our own day.

David commissioned Joab to take the census. The bold general protested as strongly as he dared against this new and dangerous procedure. But the king overruled his objections. So for almost ten months the army leaders were busied with the task of counting the able-bodied citizens. At the end of that time they reported, according to the record, a total of one million three hundred thousand fight-

ing men in the entire land. Doubtless this number has grown on its way down to us.

Retribution followed swift on the heels of the impious deed. Gad, David's court seer, appeared before the king as the prophetic herald of judgment, offering a choice of three forms of punishment. "Shall three years of famine come over your land?" he asked. "Or will you flee three months before your enemies? Or shall there be a three days' plague in your land?" David chose the plague as the least of these evils and the one in which he felt himself most directly in the merciful hand of Jehovah.

Nor was his confidence in the divine mercy disappointed. To be sure, seventy thousand persons died in the very beginning of the pestilence. But it was stopped almost at once. The destroying angel, on his way to ravage Jerusalem, had reached the outskirts of the city when Jehovah changed his purpose and cried, "Enough, now stay thy hand!" The divine avenger halted at the rocky threshing-floor of Araunah, one of the original Jebusite inhabitants of the city.

Again the prophet Gad approached his royal master. "Go up," he commanded, "rear an altar to Jehovah on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite." David and his personal followers at once climbed the hill to the floor. Araunah met them courteously and bowed to the ground. "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" he inquired. "To buy the threshing-floor of you," replied David, "to build an altar to Jehovah, that the

pestilence may be averted from the people." Araunah pointed to the oxen and the heavy wooden sledges with which he had been threshing the wheat, and said, "Let the king take and offer up what he pleases; behold the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing-sledges and the implements of the oxen for the wood—all this does your servant give to the king." But this generosity was more apparent than real. David well knew that the offer to give him whatever he wanted was simply part of the conventional courtesy that has always regulated buying and selling in the Near East. The bargaining of Ephron and Abraham in the twenty-third chapter of Genesis is a similar case.

So the king refused to accept the gift. "No," he answered in words that nobly express the underlying principle of all true sacrifice, "but I will surely buy it of you at a price. I will not offer burnt-offerings to Jehovah my God which cost me nothing." The result of the bargaining was that David bought the threshing-floor and oxen for the equivalent of thirty-five dollars.[1] On the site thus acquired he built an altar and offered sacrifices. Jehovah was evidently reconciled; the plague ceased.

The main importance of this story lies in the fact that it constitutes the charter of the most renowned holy place in all the world. On this spot Solomon afterward built the temple. For this reason Jews, Christians and Moslems alike treasure the

[1] 1 Chronicles 21:25 gives the amount as about $6000. Of course the purchasing power of either amount was many times that of today.

sacred traditions that have grown up around the site.

Hebrew Religion in David's Time.—The stories of the Famine and Plague clearly reflect some of the religious ideas of the time. Mingled with the basic moral elements of the Jehovah religion were certain crude superstitions. These were in part left over from the desert life, in part acquired from their Canaanite neighbors. Jehovah's dealings with men were thought to be somewhat arbitrary. Ritual offenses might bring heavy penalties. Blood-revenge was an essential part of religion. The king was an agent of the Deity, whose will he learned by consulting the priestly oracle or lot.

Primitive as religion remained, it nevertheless made a genuine ethical advance under David. His achievement of political unity laid the foundation for a growing sense of religious unity, which ultimately found its climax and noblest expression in the lofty monotheism of Israel's greatest prophets.

Biblical passages: II Samuel 19:40-43; 20; 21; 24.

CHAPTER XII

DAVID'S LAST DAYS

The Contest for His Throne

At the age of seventy David was an old man who had largely lost his grip. It might naturally be expected that one of his native vigor would have retained his powers far beyond that age. But a number of causes conspired to hasten his decay. The hardships and privations of early life must have left their mark upon him. Family tragedies following in quick succession had broken his spirit. The enervating luxury of an oriental court had helped make him prematurely aged. As a result of all this, the enfeebled old king sought refuge from cares of state in the seclusion of the home.

Question of David's Successor.—In a polygamous family like that of David there is apt to be considerable doubt concerning the succession to the head of the house. No one seemed to know exactly who was to take David's place in the event of his death. In the infant Hebrew state, likewise, no definite rule had been established in regard to the succession to the throne. It was possible to elect a king freely from among the leaders of the nation; or to choose the oldest son of the reigning king; or

to allow the king, subject to the approval of the people, to nominate a successor. The whole matter was in the utmost confusion.

David put off as long as possible the matter of a public statement of his desires. This was quite natural. If he had expressed himself in favor of any one of his sons, the rest would surely have felt aggrieved. Besides this, the friends of the fortunate candidate might have taken it into their heads to hasten the king's death, lest he should change his mind. For whatever reason, or lack of reason, David failed to make the proclamation that might have averted trouble.

Adonijah's Attempted Coup.—Since the tragic death of Absalom, Adonijah had been the oldest among the surviving royal princes and was, therefore, a logical candidate for the throne. Like all the sons of David he was exceedingly handsome—and also very much spoiled! We are informed that "his father had never in his life troubled him by saying, 'Why have you done so?'" He persuaded Joab the warrior and Abiathar the priest to support his pretensions. So confident was he of his future estate that he arrogated to himself royal state after the fashion of Absalom. He secured chariots and horsemen and hired fifty runners to go before him.

Affairs were brought to a crisis through a banquet given by Adonijah to a company consisting of his younger brothers and a number of selected court officials. This was held at the Serpent's Stone, just outside Jerusalem. How far Adonijah really expected to go at this time is not clear. Perhaps he

intended only to win the friendly interest of influential men. It is indeed a possibility that he wished to seize the throne at once and get rid of his father in some way. At any rate, the banqueters went much too far when, during their revels, they repeatedly raised the shout, "Long live king Adonijah!"

Nathan's Counterplot.—But there was another candidate for royal honors. Solomon, Bathsheba's second son, was being put forward by an influential party at court, headed by Nathan the prophet and Benaiah, commander of the bodyguard. It is significant that Adonijah had carefully refrained from including any of these among his invited guests. Nathan, nevertheless, was keeping himself informed concerning all the movements of Adonijah and his adherents. As soon as he got word of the happenings at the Serpent's Stone, he determined to launch a prompt counter-offensive.

Off he hastened to Bathsheba who, as he knew, wanted above all things to see her son seated upon the throne. Warning her that neither her life nor that of Solomon would be safe if Adonijah secured the throne, he urged, "Go at once to king David and say to him, 'Did you not swear to me, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne?" Why then does Adonijah reign?'" Nathan shrewdly added, "While you are still talking there with the king I also will come in after you and confirm your words."

We have no reason for supposing this statement to be an invention of Nathan and Bathsheba. It is

quite possible that she had wheedled some such pledge out of the doting king. Possibly the secret had reached the ears of the Adonijah party and had prompted their gathering. At any rate David never denied making the promise.

Nathan's clever plan worked without a hitch. When Bathsheba had pleaded her cause, and Nathan had confirmed her statements, the feeble king roused himself to decisive action. "As I have sworn to you," he assured Bathsheba, "verily, so will I do this day." Thereupon he commanded Zadok the priest, and Nathan, and Benaiah, to place Solomon on the king's own mule and conduct him to Gihon. At this holy spot, located just below the palace and only a few hundred yards distant from the place where Adonijah and his friends were celebrating, they were to anoint Solomon king.

Supported by the royal bodyguard, these servants of David went at once to Gihon to carry out his commands. At the supreme moment in the ceremony, while Zadok was pouring upon Solomon's head the sacred oil of anointing, the trumpets blew and the assembled people raised a mighty shout that seemed to split the earth asunder. "Long live king Solomon!" they cried.

The carousal at the Serpent's Stone was nearing its end. Joab, hearing the thunderous shout, anxiously inquired, "Why does the voice of the city roar?" At that very moment Jonathan, Abiathar's son, rushed up. "Come in," invited Adonijah, "for you are a valiant man and bring good tidings." "Nay," he replied, "but our lord king David has

made Solomon king." He went on with an alarming account of what had happened. The terrified guests, realizing that their cause was lost, scattered swiftly here and there. Adonijah himself fled to the protection of the altar of Jehovah; this he refused to leave unless Solomon should agree not to kill him.

With a display of clemency all too rare in oriental rulers Solomon promised, "If he shall show himself a worthy man, not a hair of him shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness be found in him, he shall die." So Adonijah came and did obeisance to his successful brother; then he was permitted to return to his house. How unjust must have seemed to him the fate that had deprived him of a throne he deemed rightfully his own!

David's Dying Charge.—Not long after these events David passed away. On his death-bed he made three requests of Solomon: (1) that he should avenge the murders of Abner and Amasa by putting Joab to death; (2) that he should reward the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite for their father's kindness to David when he fled before Absalom; and (3) that he should execute Shimei because of the curses he had heaped upon the king on the occasion of his flight. In the last case he admitted his oath to spare Shimei, but suggested that Solomon was not necessarily bound by it.

Such a legacy of hate and revenge as is contained in the first and last of these injunctions seems completely out of harmony with the king's usual magnanimity toward enemies and his unwillingness to

shed needless blood. Perhaps we may plead in his defense that he was not in full possession of his faculties at the end. On the other hand we ought not to expect of one living in the tenth century B.C. the advanced Christian ethics of our own twentieth century A.D. The king was a child of his age and was, therefore, swayed by its beliefs. One of these stressed the sacred duty of blood-revenge. To let Joab's wilful murders go unavenged was to invite wholesale destruction upon the entire nation. Similarly, in the case of Shimei, we should recall how potent a curse was considered to be in ancient times. Unless it could in some way be rolled back on the speaker, it was supposed to be full of dire possibilities of continued evil. David may have felt perfectly justified under the circumstances in settling his deferred accounts against Shimei and his nephew Joab. In fact, it may have seemed to him a matter of simple duty to act as he did.

So David died. He was the most heroic of all the kings in Hebrew story. Seven years had he reigned at Hebron over Judah; thirty-three years at Jerusalem over the united kingdom. His life had been full of adventure. In the City of David they laid him to rest. His son Solomon succeeded to the throne unopposed.

Estimate of David's Character.—In attempting a just appraisal of the qualities that made David great, we are at once confronted by the fact that the Old Testament gives at least three biographies of him. That contained in the books of Chronicles is least valuable for our purpose. It was written

very late (about 250 B.C.); its author had access to very few additional facts about David; and, in addition, his interest centers so exclusively about the priesthood and temple that he gives the surprising impression that the great king was primarily and principally a good high churchman.

The other two lives of David are the so-called Samuel and Saul documents, which have been woven together to form the present books of Samuel. Inasmuch as the Samuel document is about a century later (about 750 B.C.) than the Saul document and repeats largely the same material with perhaps a bit too much philosophizing, scholars are inclined to use the Saul document as their principal source. It is this that furnishes the earliest, simplest and most historical portrait of the real David. From it we see that, alike in his good and bad qualities, he was an extremely positive character.

It is easy enough to pick flaws in David's character; his faults lie quite close to the surface. Like other oriental monarchs of his day and since, he practised what seems to us unnecessary cruelty and craftiness, especially in his treatment of foes. The quality of his domestic life was sadly lowered by his great sin, and by his almost criminal weakness toward his children. His religious life, devout as it was, falls, of course, far short of the ideals of the New Testament; he shared many of the current superstitions and inadequate beliefs of his own day. Living as he did in the midst of an oriental civilization three thousand years ago, he shows many of the faults of his time and place.

Nevertheless we ought in all fairness to realize that few men of his age could have faced his temptations and hardships and done so little to offend our moral sense. In vivid contrast with his defects, the great virtues of the heroic king stand forth all the more clearly. What, then, are some of his more favorable qualities?

We at once recognize courage as a conspicuous element in David's make-up. At a time when the fighter was the first man in the nation, he exemplified the soldierly quality of courage in the fullest degree. As captain of a band of freebooters in the earlier part of his career, his boldness drew to him a remarkable group of champions renowned in single combat. The battles he so ceaselessly waged against outside foes called for steady nerves as well as skill. The singing women bear witness to achievements that required courage.

Tact was a useful quality which he exhibited to an unusual degree throughout his varied life. When his rude followers threatened at one time to come to blows over the distribution of the Amalekite plunder, he diplomatically ruled that non-combatants should share alike with fighters. On this same occasion he sent valuable presents to the leaders in Judah. This was a farsighted move on the part of one who was wistfully looking forward to ruling that tribe some day.

As a general rule he displayed kindness toward his friends and magnanimity toward his enemies. After Jonathan was gone he made his crippled son a member of the royal household. Hunted like a

dangerous wild beast by Saul, he nevertheless spared his life at a time when he held him absolutely within his power. Absalom merited little favor from the father he had so cruelly wronged; yet David exerted himself to the utmost to save his life and would gladly have died in his stead. For a time at least he generously overlooked Shimei's insulting behavior. These illustrations show how kindly was the spirit of the king in his best days.

Personally he was attractive, winsome, lovable. Saul had but to look on him to love him. Jonathan might easily have been expected to become jealous of this rising young warrior, a possible rival for the throne; instead, so greatly was he drawn toward him that his soul was "knit with the soul of David" in a love that was "wonderful, passing the love of women." Women naturally adored David. Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, the dancing women—all were won by the charm of the young hero and king. The very fact that such greatly contrasted characters as Samuel and Joab were intensely devoted to him shows how remarkable was his power of inspiring affection.

Above all, he was devoutly religious. Never did he make an important decision without first consulting the oracle of Jehovah. He readily obeyed the divine word as it came to him through the prophets Nathan and Gad. The priests Abiathar and Zadok held high place in his court. One of his first acts after capturing Jerusalem was to provide for the return of the ark. To be sure, we cannot take at their face value the impressions of

later writers who portray him as a ritualistic saint, founder of the Jewish church and organizer of an elaborate priestly system. Nevertheless we may be sure that, according to the lights of his own day, David was a man of deep and sincere piety.

It should also be pointed out in this connection that David was a good penitent. He knew how to be sorry for his sins. Nathan's reproof after the sin with Bathsheba fell on heedful ears. Small wonder that the fifty-first Psalm, that great classic of repentance, was dedicated to the great king and connected with his remorse for his crime.

David is not by any means a model of all the virtues. There is considerable alloy mixed in with the pure gold of his character. But the striking fact about him is that the good in him so far outweighs the evil. And so intensely human is he in every respect that he infallibly draws to himself the sympathy, the admiration and the affection of mankind of whatever age. Were the ancient writers so far wide of the mark, after all, when they described this versatile soldier-king as a man after God's own heart?

David and the Psalter.—Because of David's skill as a musician and poet (see his laments in II Sam. 1:17-27; 3:33, 34), he became the patron saint of Hebrew religious poetry. One of the collections of hymns that went to make up our present book of Psalms was accordingly dedicated to him. This does not mean that he actually wrote all the Psalms that bear in their titles the heading, "to David." He may have written some of them. But these, like

many of our modern hymns, have been so repeatedly revised to meet new religious conceptions that we cannot hope to determine which are his. The dedication of them to David was, however, a happy thought in that it constantly reminds us both of the musical ability and the religious devotion of the gifted Poet-King.

Biblical passages: I Kings 1; 2:1-12.

CHAPTER XIII

SOLOMON, THE SPLENDID DESPOT

Solomon's Opportunity.—It was a magnificent opportunity which Solomon faced when, about the year 970 B.C., he ascended the throne of his father David. The way had been well prepared for him. Sixty years before his time the erratic giant Saul had won over the hearts of the people to the idea of the kingship. To be sure, his career had at last been blotted out in tragic failure. But this had been retrieved by David. Of winsome personality, warlike skill and rare organizing genius, he had taken up Saul's unfinished task and carried it well on toward completion. The Philistines were decisively defeated by him and expelled from the land. Most of the neighboring peoples had been forced into subjection. By his inspired choice of Jerusalem as the capital of the united kingdom, David had gone far toward healing the ancient and dangerous feud between North and South.

As the dominant power in Palestine at the time of Solomon's accession, Israel enjoyed great prestige everywhere. Naturally this bred in the hearts of the people a very definite pride in their citizenship. Peace, hard won by force of arms, was opening up splendid possibilities for foreign

THE DOMINIONS OF
SOLOMON
Statute Miles
0 10 20 40 60
Kingdom of David
THE GREAT SEA
PHOENICIA
ZOBAH
SYRIA
Hamath
Kadesh
Riblah
Zidon
Zaraphath
Damascus
Tyre
Abel Beth Maachah
ARGOB
GALILEE
BASHAN
Ravoth Jair
Mt Carmel
Jokneam
Dothan
Mahanaim
Jopp
Ashdod
Ashkelon
Azzah
HEBRON
JERUSALEM
Heshbon
Ammon
Arvoer
Tamar
Wilderness of Paran
Sela
Ezion Geber
Eloth
35
34
33
32
31
30
31
36
37

commerce and for the development of the internal resources of the kingdom. The enthusiastic personal loyalty that centered about David might easily be transferred to his chosen successor. It was truly a legacy of worthy accomplishment and magnificent prospects that great King David left to his son.

At the same time there were real perils very near the surface, which behooved the new king to tread carefully. Any tendency toward tyranny would be quickly resented by his liberty-loving subjects. The bond that held the kingdom together might easily be broken should Solomon prove unworthy. Any internal weakness in the nation would be a signal for their subject neighbors to seek freedom and revenge. The question must have been asked: Will the new king have the wisdom and tact to improve the opportunities and avoid the dangers of his position?

How Solomon Got Rid of Opponents.—Whatever high hopes may have been cherished by democratic Israelites must have been crushingly disappointed by the opening events of Solomon's reign. It was soon clear that his spirit was that of an autocrat. Unlike his father, he had little sympathy with the democratic aspirations of his people. There manifested itself in him a rather cynical disregard of what the common person might do or say. Especially did he prove himself a typical oriental despot by the arbitrary manner in which he got rid, one by one, of the men who might possibly have stood in his way.

It is not at all uncommon for an eastern poten-

tate, upon taking the throne, to murder all the male members of his family and any others whom he thinks opposed to him. Solomon went far in this direction. His older brother Adonijah was, naturally enough, the special object of his suspicion. At any moment there might come a sudden turn of affairs that would make him king in Solomon's stead. A pretext for putting him out of the way would, therefore, be most welcome.

Adonijah himself furnished this pretext by seeking to secure Abishag the Shunammite, one of David's young concubines, for his wife. Possibly there was more in his desire than simple affection for the beautiful young woman. According to ancient Semitic custom, the wives of a man became the property of his heir. It would, therefore, strengthen Adonijah's claim that he was David's lawful heir if he could secure one of the late king's concubines.

It was to Bathsheba, of old a breeder of mischief, that Adonijah came with his unlucky petition. By virtue of her position as queen-mother she now occupied a far more influential position at court than that accorded her while David still lived. Adonijah easily secured an audience with her. After a few preliminaries he made his request. "Please ask of Solomon, the king," he begged, "for he will not refuse you—that he give me Abishag the Shunammite as wife." "Good," replied Bathsheba, "I will speak for you to the king."

Confident that her influence with her son would secure a favorable response, Bathsheba went to

Solomon. She was graciously received. But when she explained her errand the king flew into a rage. With bitter irony he asked: "And why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom also! For he is my older brother, and on his side are Abiathar and Joab. As Jehovah lives, Adonijah shall surely be put to death today." And so it was. At Solomon's command Benaiah, captain of the bodyguard, promptly went out and killed the unlucky man.

Abiathar and Joab, the two principal supporters of Adonijah, also fell under Solomon's suspicion. He determined to lose no time. Abiathar, the priest, was banished to his farm at Anathoth. He escaped the sentence of death partly because of his sacred office and partly because of his former fidelity to David. His position as head of the royal sanctuary was transferred to the family of Zadok. This position the Zadokites held for the following eight centuries. In the time of Christ we find the name continued in the party of the Sadducees.

Joab did not get off so easily as Abiathar had done. When he heard what Solomon was doing, he fled to the altar of Jehovah and claimed its refuge. But even this holy place furnished no safety from Solomon's hot wrath. Solomon sent Benaiah to the sanctuary with the order, "Go, strike him down!" Unwilling to slay a man in the sacred precincts, Benaiah tried to induce Joab to come forth. "No," replied the old warrior, "I would rather die here." Benaiah returned to Solomon and repeated what Joab had said. "Do as he said," commanded the

king, "strike him down and bury him. He struck down two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword without the knowledge of my father David: namely, Abner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa, commander of the army of Judah." So Benaiah killed Joab in cold blood before the altar.

Thus was vengeance visited upon Joab's head for the murders he had done. And, perhaps still more important to Solomon's way of thinking, a dangerous potential opponent was placed where he could do no harm. They put the rough old warrior to rest in his family tomb out in the wilderness of Judea east of Bethlehem. He had been rewarded for his ruthless service of the interests of David by a criminal's death. It would seem that, despite his crimes, he deserved better at Solomon's hands. His old position as commander-in-chief of the army was awarded to Benaiah, his executioner.

Shimei, who had stoned and cursed David, still remained on the king's black-list. He was summoned to Jerusalem, where he could easily be watched. On pain of death, he was forbidden to leave the capital. In particular, he was ordered never to cross the brook Kidron, which bounds Jerusalem on the east. This meant that he could not visit his home at Bahurim. Of course he had to agree.

At the end of three years, however, restless Shimei broke his pact. Two of his slaves ran away to Gath, where they took refuge with King Achish. He set out in pursuit and brought them back. This

gave Solomon the excuse he was seeking. Calling in the culprit he accused him of breaking his oath, and also reminded him of his insulting treatment of David. No mercy was shown. Benaiah again acted the bloody rôle of royal executioner. Another victim was out of Solomon's way!

It may be urged that the king, at least in the case of Joab and Shimei, was piously fulfilling his father's dying request. Even so we should have preferred to see him exhibit a more merciful spirit. It is to be remembered, too, that no such excuse existed for his treatment of Adonijah or Abiathar. So far as we can judge, Solomon was mainly concerned with strengthening his hold on the throne. To accomplish this purpose, he seized every opportunity of ridding himself of possible rivals or opponents.

Solomon's Splendor.—In later ages of heart-breaking poverty and foreign oppression, the Hebrews came to look back to the reign of Solomon as an age of boundless plenty. There was much to support this belief. Solomon's domain was extensive. It is said that he made silver in Jerusalem as common as stones, and the costly cedar timber as abundant as sycamores in the Shephelah. Five hundred shields of gold for his bodyguard, an ivory throne overlaid with gold for his own use, drinking vessels made entirely of gold—these are a few details of the luxury of his court. Even if we must take some of these romantic statements as legendary in part, it is clear that Solomon was a very rich man.

Officials.—In keeping with the new splendor of the court, the staff of officials was considerably increased over that of David's time. A palace superintendent now makes his appearance. Court priests, secretaries, advisers to the king, a chronicler, a commander-in-chief of the army, a supervisor of forced labor—these and many others were on the rolls. So efficient was this ruling and taxing organization that it kept in check the rising tide of discontent. A soulless machine intended to aggrandize the monarch, it commanded fear where it could not inspire affection.

Chariots.—Horses and chariots were purchased by Solomon in large numbers. Not only did these make a fine military display—they helped also to overawe any citizen who felt inclined to protest against wrongs. A few of the chariots were reserved for the king's personal use at Jerusalem. The rest were assigned to cities in the lowland, where the ground was level enough for their use. Up to this time chariots had been almost unknown in the fighting forces of Israel. From now on they are mentioned occasionally. However, the mainstay of the army continued to be the foot-soldiers.

The Harem.—In the size and renown of his harem, Solomon went far beyond his father. His skill as a lover is remembered in the late collection of wedding songs called the Song of Solomon. Tradition has it that the magnificent king had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Princesses from surrounding kingdoms were num-

bered among the wives. Such marriages were often arranged for the purpose of strengthening political and commercial alliances.

By far the most famous of Solomon's foreign wives was the daughter of the reigning Pharaoh of Egypt. Her father gave a wedding present worthy of the event; he conquered the town of Gezer on the coast plain and presented it to his new son-in-law. Solomon showed his appreciation of the honor conferred upon him by building a separate palace for his Egyptian bride. It was indeed a surprising act of condescension for a Pharaoh to make an alliance with the ruler of a comparatively insignificant country like Israel. Possibly the fact that Solomon was now in control of all Palestine gave him standing in Pharaoh's eyes. It was worth much to the king of Egypt to have on his side the master of the bridge between Africa and Asia.

Trade and Commerce.—Solomon's need for money was always urgent. So he entered business. He went into horse-trading, a line of endeavor in which his native shrewdness would be a valuable asset. Having started importing horses for his own use, he decided to branch out and carry on an export trade with neighboring peoples. It is a safe guess that he charged all the traffic would bear, and that his profits were considerable.

Another and more important enterprise was the building of a fleet of ships to engage in the Far Eastern trade. To build and sail ships was beyond the skill of the Hebrews. But the Phœnicians

were born sailors. So Solomon entered into partnership with Hiram, king of the small but extremely wealthy city-state of Tyre.

Near the Edomite city of Elath on an arm of the Red Sea, Hiram's workmen constructed the fleet. Soon Solomon's men were sailing the seas, directed by experienced Phœnician navigators. The remote land of Ophir, in eastern Arabia or southern Africa, was the most renowned of their goals. From trips that lasted at times three years, the ships returned laden with precious stones and the strange products of distant lands. Great cargoes of gold worth over ten millions of dollars are said to have been carried back to Solomon.

In addition to his revenues from trade, it is quite possible that Solomon levied a customs tax on the great caravans that passed through Palestine. His total annual income, really a fabulous sum for those days, is estimated by the Biblical historian at over twenty million dollars. Its purchasing value today would be several times that amount.

Direct Taxation.—Vast quantities of provisions were required to supply the enormous household of the king. To secure these Solomon resorted to direct taxation. He divided the kingdom into twelve districts, under royal governors. Each governor was required to collect from his district supplies for the imperial household one month in the year.

The daily assessment consisted of a tremendous quantity of provender for the royal stables, three hundred bushels of fine flour, six hundred bushels of

meal, ten fatted and ten meadow-fed oxen, a hundred sheep, and besides, as many extra delicacies in the way of harts, gazelles, roebucks and fatted fowl as could be found. It is estimated that this was enough food to support from thirty to thirty-five thousand courtiers and soldiers. It amounted probably to a tenth of the produce of the land.

In the East direct taxes have always been even more unpopular than in the West. It is argued that the king is already rich in his own private estates and his share of the spoils of war. Why, then, should he take away the possessions of his subjects? Consequently Solomon's new order of things was met by bitter resentment. Doubtless the method of collecting the tax increased the ill-feeling. It is the oriental custom to 'farm out' taxes. Under this system the officials are assessed a certain amount by the central government. They then proceed to squeeze the citizens for as much as they can get, sometimes securing many times the original amount assessed. Solomon's subjects were not in a mood to pay ruinous taxes in order to support the empty splendors of his court.

Solomon's Financial Difficulties.—Despite his enormous revenues, spendthrift Solomon got into debt. His outgo far outran his income. He was obliged to sell twenty cities in Galilee to Hiram of Tyre in order to get cash. Three and one-half million dollars in gold was the selling price. It would seem that the king got the better of his astute partner in this transaction. For when Hiram came to inspect his purchase he grumbled,

"What sort of cities are these you have given me, my brother?"

A mania for splendor was making of the richest man in the world the most poverty-stricken. He was undermining the loyalty of his subjects by unreasonable taxation to support his vain show. He had shown his temper by the ruthless murder of some of the leaders of the nation. No wonder splendid Solomon came to be regarded by many as an unfeeling despot.

Biblical passages: I Kings 2:13-46; 4; 9:10-28.

CHAPTER XIV

SOLOMON, THE EXTRAVAGANT BUILDER

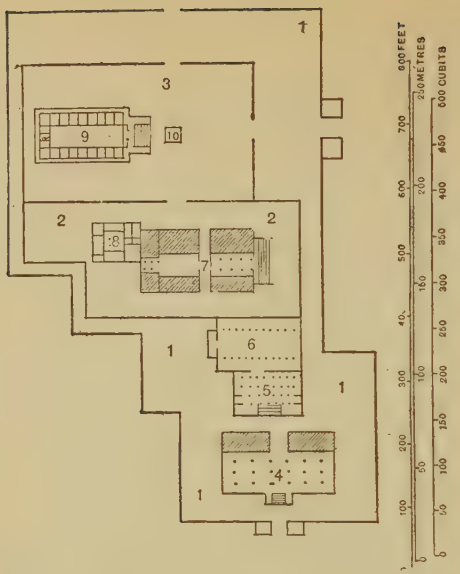
The Building Mania.—Many an absolute monarch has been overcome by an uncontrollable desire to erect magnificent and expensive buildings. King Solomon did not escape. The idea appealed to his vanity and love of display. In the book of Ecclesiastes, written many centuries after his time, there is put into the mouth of the aged Solomon a frank confession of his folly in this respect. He says, "I undertook great works; I built me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and parks. And I looked at all my works, and behold the whole was vanity and a longing after wind."

In view of the results, Solomon might well have decided that his enterprises were not worth while. For the expense was so outrageous that the land came perilously near bankruptcy. His method of securing workers was also most unwise. Instead of hiring men at fair wages, he adopted the Egyptian method of drafting citizens into forced labor. Both Canaanites and Hebrews were included in the levy. Thirty thousand men, divided into squads of ten thousand, each on service one month and at home two, toiled in the Lebanon forest felling the lofty cedars. Seventy thousand were made to carry

loads like beasts of burden. Another eighty thousand were set to the arduous task of quarrying great blocks of stone in the mountains. So stupendous was the king's building program that this army of toilers was none too large—especially when one considers the fact that forced labor is never as efficient as free. It always happens, too, under such a system that the loss of life due to accident and brutal treatment is excessively large. The net result was that a great deal of bitter feeling grew up against the king and his building hobby.

But even this enormous body of native workers was not enough. The Israelites were still comparatively uncultured, and there were few artisans among them with skill enough to erect the splendid buildings Solomon had in mind. So he turned to his neighbor, Hiram of Tyre. From him he secured a host of trained and expert builders. Hiram also supplied the fine timber required for the better class of structures. In payment, Solomon shipped to him vast quantities of grain and choice olive oil. Of course the Hebrew tax-payers had to settle the bill. No wonder that they grew sullen and discontented. The more high-spirited among them were ready for revolt. If the king had deliberately planned to destroy the national spirit, he could have chosen no surer way.

Fortresses and Store Cities.—In order to protect the land again invasion Solomon strengthened and fortified six cities located at strategic points. Hazor in the extreme north dominated an important entrance to the land; Megiddo, southeast of Mount



(*From the Encyclopedia Biblica, A. & C. Black, Ltd., London*)

FIG. 1—Plan of the buildings of Solomon (after Stade).
1. 'Great court.' 2. 'Second court.' 3. 'Court of the Temple.' 4. House of the forest of Lebanon. 5. Hall of Pillars. 6. Hall of Judgment. 7. Royal Palace. 8. Harem. 9. Temple. 10. Altar.

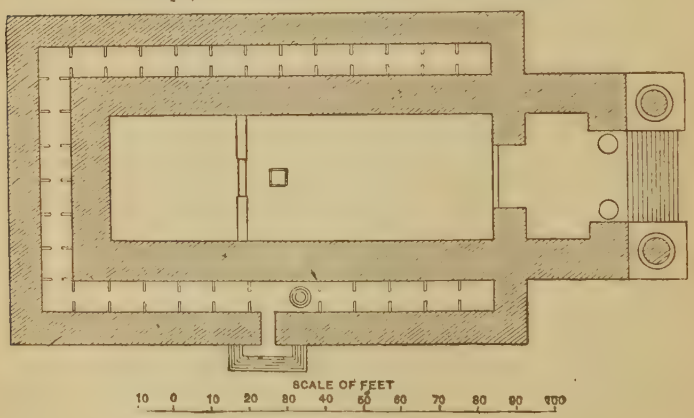


FIG. 2.—Ground-plan of the Temple.

Carmel, guarded the great caravan route from Egypt to the east by way of the plain of Esdraelon; Gezer stood at the entrance to the valley of Ajalon, the chief approach to Jerusalem from the coast plain; Lower Bethhoron was situated on an important road from the low foothills of the Shephelah to the Judean table-land; Baalath and Tamar stood sentinel toward the south. The fact that some of these fortresses were situated beside important trade routes may have been in the mind of Solomon when he fortified them. So shrewd a business man would scarcely have missed the chance to collect toll from passing caravans in return for protection.

Besides these strongholds, other cities were rebuilt for storing supplies, and yet others as headquarters for the chariot forces. The sum total of these building operations must have been enormous.

The Palace Buildings.—It was at Jerusalem, however, that the king fairly outdid himself. The encompassing walls were rebuilt, enlarged, strengthened. In every possible way the city was adorned and beautified. It came to be one of the show places of the Semitic world. Most magnificent and costly of all were the royal structures constituting the castle group, which were built on the hill of Ophel. The fact that it required thirteen years of hard labor to complete the palace buildings proper and seven and one-half years more to build the temple, indicates somewhat the splendor and importance of this group.

The description of these structures is very

meager and not always clear. However, it would seem that, farthest down the hill and, therefore, easiest of approach from the city lying to the south, stood the House of the Forest of Lebanon. It was so called because its lofty roof was upheld by forty-five massive cedar pillars from Mount Lebanon. It measured about one hundred and fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide and forty-five feet high. Apparently there was an upper story used as an armory for the weapons and golden shields of the royal bodyguard. The spacious ground floor served as an assembly hall. It must have been a very imposing edifice.

Up the hill from the Forest of Lebanon was a smaller structure, seventy-five by forty-five feet, called the Hall of Pillars. It served as a waiting-room for those who had lawsuits to try before the king. Next higher came a sumptuous chamber lined with costly cedar timber, known as the Throne Hall, or Hall of Justice. Here Solomon held court and received visitors. The canopied throne on which he sat was a masterpiece of oriental art, lavishly overlaid with ivory and gold. Beside each arm of the throne stood the figure of a lion, and twelve additional lions stood on each side of the six steps by which the king mounted.

Beyond these buildings and close to the temple were two additional structures: the private residence of the king, and the house of his favorite queen, the daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt.

Light and air for all these buildings was provided by spacious courtyards. An outer wall en-

circled the entire group. This wall was made of blocks of hewn stones surmounted by an upper course of cedar beams.

The Temple.—Solomon built the temple on the summit of the hill. In fact he had no choice of sites. Tradition already marked that spot as the place where the plague had been miraculously stayed in the time of David. It is also exceedingly probable that this high place was sacred ground long before the Hebrews invaded the land.

The temple, massively built of stone, faced the rising sun. In general plan and decorations it followed the model of Phœnician and Babylonian temples. Within, it was paneled with the beautiful and fragrant cedar timber from Lebanon.

A separate court surrounded by a wall marked off the temple from the rest of the group of buildings. From this court, steps led to a porch, fifteen feet deep, on the front of the temple. Detached bronze pillars stood on the porch, one at each side of the temple door. These pillars were twenty-seven feet high, and were crowned with capitals measuring another eight feet, curiously and elaborately designed. Apparently the pillars were artificial imitations of the stone obelisks regarded as a necessary part of the equipment of Semitic sanctuaries. In the earlier period the Deity was supposed to dwell in these objects; in more enlightened times the pillars were looked upon only as symbols of his presence. Solomon's pillars bore, for some unexplained reason, the names Jachin and Boaz.

From the porch a door opened into the larger outer room of the temple, called the Holy Place. This was rectangular in shape, sixty feet long, thirty feet broad, and thirty feet high. In it stood a table for the sacred shewbread; also a lamp or candlestick.

Beyond this was the inner shrine or oracle, known as the Holy of Holies. It was a room without windows, in the form of a cube, thirty feet on a side. It contained nothing except the ark, overshadowed by the outspread wings of two gigantic composite animals called cherubim. In this innermost shrine Jehovah was believed to make his special abode.

All about the sides and rear of the temple were three tiers of small chambers, entered from the outside. In them were kept the vessels used in worship, the garments of the priests, the offerings and dues brought to the sanctuary, and possibly royal and even private treasures placed for safe keeping under the care of the Deity.

It will be seen that the temple was small as compared with the average church building of our day. But it did not need to be large. None but the priests ever entered it; the worshipers remained in the court. It served simply as a dwelling for Jehovah where, like a great earthly king, he received the allegiance of his people.

Directly in front of the temple, in the middle of the court, was the natural stone summit of the hill. This rock appears to have been the great altar of the temple, upon which sacrifices were offered. It

is now to be seen under the magnificent Dome of the Rock.

Not far from the altar stood the Bronze Sea. This was a huge circular tank fifteen feet across and holding sixteen thousand gallons of water. It was supported upon the backs of twelve bronze bulls who faced outward, three toward each cardinal point of the compass. For the practical purpose of supplying the priests with water for purification, ten smaller bronze bowls were provided. Each of these so-called "lavers" was furnished with a wheeled carriage, and held almost four hundred gallons of water. In addition, the temple was lavishly equipped with pots, shovels, bowls and ornaments, all cast in bronze by the same Tyrian craftsmen who had fashioned the pillars and tanks already described.

Dedication of the Temple.—The long and arduous task of building the temple came at last to an end. There remained the solemn duty of formally dedicating it to its high purpose as the dwelling of Jehovah, God of Israel. The notable men of the kingdom came to Jerusalem to assist at the ceremony of consecration.

First of all the ark must be transferred to its new abode. In stately procession the priests carried the ancient and revered chest from the simple tent where David had kept it to the inner shrine of the temple. According to custom the event was marked by elaborate sacrifices. The sheep and oxen slain by the king as the procession moved onward were too numerous to count.

As part of the ceremony King Solomon recited a poem. The men who wrote our present book of Kings found it in a collection of national songs called the Book of Jashar. It read:

> "Jehovah has set the sun in the heavens,
> He himself has willed to dwell in thick darkness.
> I have built thee a house to dwell in,
> A dwelling place for thee eternally."

This bit of poetry is evidence of the king's belief that Jehovah literally lived in the temple. It also voices his satisfaction that the unpretentious tent of earlier and more primitive days has at last been replaced by an abode for the Deity at once worthy and permanent. Above all, it suggests, in the figure of thick darkness, the feeling of reverential awe with which men used to approach divine mysteries.

A noble oration and a long prayer of wondrous beauty and lofty sentiment are also credited to Solomon on this occasion. While we can hardly accept these as coming in exactly their present form from the king himself, they do at least show what exalted prophetic hopes and ideals early centered about the holy house. Altogether it was a momentous day when the temple was consecrated.

Importance of the Temple.—At first the temple was hardly more than Solomon's private chapel. The national sanctuaries at Dan, Bethel and Beersheba, with their age-long traditions, surpassed it in the esteem of the people. But as time went on, the temple rapidly increased in importance. Soon

it was enjoying a prestige far beyond that of any of its rivals. Even hoary Mount Sinai was eclipsed. The nation came to look to Jerusalem as the real abiding place of Jehovah.

Several factors united to push the temple to the forefront. Of all the Hebrew sanctuaries it was the most magnificent. It was centrally located at the capital. It enjoyed royal patronage. The influential priestly family of Zadok was in charge. Most important of all, it contained the sacred ark, chief of the religious treasures of Israel. The fact that in later generations many of the great prophets carried on their fight for social and religious reform in its courts also contributed to the preëminence of the Jerusalem sanctuary. When, finally, in 621 B.C. Josiah carried out the Deuteronomic reforms making the temple the only legal sanctuary in the land, its absolute supremacy was no longer open to question.

Even the destruction of Solomon's structure by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. could not mar the sanctity of the site. Spurred on by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the poverty stricken people built the second temple during the years 520 to 516 B.C. Later, in 17 B.C., Herod the Great began the great work of restoring and beautifying this second temple, a task that had hardly been completed when Titus burned it down in 70 A.D.

Today the temple area is holy ground for Jews, Christians and Moslems. It is at present in possession of the Moslems who, while admitting Christian visitors, jealously exclude Jews. Now

that the British are making Palestine a national home for the Jews, it is fascinating to speculate whether the Hebrew people will again secure admission to the site on which Solomon the Builder erected the most significant structure in the history of the religions of the world.

Solomon builded better than he knew when he erected Jehovah's dwelling. More is the pity that it had to be part of a reckless building program and a policy of oppression that split the kingdom!

Biblical passage: I Kings 5:1 to 9:9.

CHAPTER XV

SOLOMON, THE FOOLISH WISE MAN

"He was wisest of men"—so declares the Biblical writer concerning Solomon. Is this a correct judgment? What kind of wisdom did he possess? We will make it our task to seek answers to both these questions.

Dream at Gibeon.—Soon after his accession to the throne, young King Solomon celebrated the event by a stupendous ceremony of thanksgiving at the famous sanctuary of Gibeon, six miles northwest of Jerusalem. On the altars of Gibeon's great high place, he and the attendant priests offered to Jehovah a burnt offering of a thousand animals. There on the hill-top, far up in the face of the heavens, took place the impressive ceremony of homage and praise to Jehovah.

No doubt the king was deeply moved by the solemn rites. He must have felt at the same time somewhat depressed at the thought of the weighty responsibilities that were now to bear down upon his shoulders. It was no easy thing to follow David as ruler. Solomon's mood combined a feeling of exaltation with a sense of profound humility. He was in a position to make worthy choices.

That night, as if in answer to an unspoken prayer for aid, Jehovah appeared to him in a dream. "Ask what you want me to give you," he said. Solomon replied, "Give to your servant an understanding mind to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil."

Jehovah was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom rather than wealth or military glory. So he replied, "I give you a wise and discerning mind," and then added, "And I also give you that which you have not asked: both riches and honor." Thus, according to the story, did Solomon acquire by special divine gift the wisdom for which he was afterward famous.

Two Mothers and a Child.—After Solomon had returned to Jerusalem, he soon found an opportunity to make use of his newly won wisdom. Two women appealed to him to decide a serious dispute which had arisen between them. They lived in the same house. Within three days of one another, each bore a son. One of them claimed that the other woman accidentally crushed her own child to death by rolling over on him while she slept. At midnight, discovering what had happened, she arose and exchanged her dead child for the living child of the first woman. In the morning the robbed mother at once recognized that the dead baby was not her own. Before the king each woman insisted that the living child belonged to her.

It was a difficult case to decide. There were no witnesses except the women themselves. Solomon

solved the problem by the exercise of practical common sense and shrewd insight into human nature. Turning to his attendants he commanded, "Bring me a sword." The astonished servants obeyed. He continued, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other."

The ruse was successful. Unable to bear the thought of seeing her son cut in two, the real mother cried out, "O, my lord, give her the living child and on no account put it to death!" In sullen tones the other woman kept saying, "It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it." There was no doubt whose the child was. Pointing to the woman who had offered to give up her son, the king commanded, "Give her the living child; she is his mother."

The Queen of Sheba.—In the course of time Solomon acquired a widespread reputation for cleverness. We are told that rulers came from distant lands to hear and admire his witty discourses. Among these the Queen of Sheba was the best remembered. Her powerful kingdom lay far away in southwest Arabia. With her camels bowed down by the weight of rare treasures, she made the long journey to Solomon in order to "test him with riddles."

It is quite possible that her real purpose was not so much to propound riddles as to make a political and commercial treaty with the famous king. If so, this object was forgotten by the story-tellers in the course of the centuries. What remained in the

memories of the Hebrews was the tradition of Solomon's clever repartee and his uncanny skill in solving the riddles and enigmas she offered. This, and the extravagant luxury of the court, simply dumfounded the queen. "Behold the half was not told me," she burst forth. "You surpass in wisdom and prosperity the report that I heard!"

All too soon the hour came for the queen to depart. Before going she unwrapped the bales and bundles the camels had carried. She gave rich presents to the king—precious stones, gold to the value of three and one-half millions of dollars, and such abundance of spices as were never again seen in Jerusalem. In return, Solomon freely gave her all she asked or wished.

It would be only natural if some exaggeration has crept into the Biblical narrative. When the Mohammedans in their turn took over the story, they embellished it much further. The fantastic episodes they introduced carry us into the eerie atmosphere of the Arabian Nights themselves. Incredible superhuman feats are performed by Solomon with the aid of the genii, the fire-created demons of the wilderness. These extravagant legends add nothing, of course, to our understanding of Solomon. They do, however, testify to the vivid impression made by the king on the lively imaginations of his own and later generations.

Solomon's Wisdom.—Quick wit and native shrewdness, it is clear, were the chief elements in the wisdom of Solomon. His keen and alert mind gave him the ability to make quick and at the same

time correct judgments. A genius for witty remarks and clever sayings made his speech brilliant and interesting. These were the gifts and qualities which gave him his reputation for wisdom.

But when it came to matters of state the king seemed singularly lacking in true wisdom. We miss in him the qualities of sympathy, tolerance and tact that would have enabled him to understand the temper and aspirations of his democratic subjects. Besides this, a fatal lack of balance made him a reckless spender and a lover of vain display. For him the nation existed mainly for the purpose of supporting the throne. The conception of the king as the servant of the people was utterly strange to him. Neither in the realm of good government nor of religion did he manifest real wisdom. His wisdom was, after all, strictly limited in its scope.

Solomon's Relation to Proverbs.—As Jewish tradition connected the Law with the name of Moses and the Psalms with that of David, so it assigned the book of Proverbs to Solomon. In all these cases the names of these renowned heroes of the past were attached as patron saints to the class of literature most closely connected with their interests and activities.

It is recorded of Solomon that he spoke a thousand and five songs and three thousand proverbs. In these shrewd observations he covered a wide range, including trees, beasts, birds, fish and creeping things. Very likely he uttered some of the terse sayings preserved in the book of Proverbs. But in the course of centuries the various collections

included in that book have been repeatedly altered and revised. As a consequence we cannot even be sure that all the proverbs in the collections that bear his name are from him. Several of the divisions of the book are definitely ascribed to other writers. But in spite of the fact that the greater part of the book cannot possibly be by Solomon, there is a certain fitness in attaching his name to it. He more than any other Hebrew had gained a reputation for sayings like many of those in Proverbs.

Solomon's Religious Folly.—Attention has already been called to the fact that Solomon was most unwise in his mad love for show. It led him into a feverish career of wastefulness. Heavy taxation and the enslavement of his subjects followed. Only thus could he maintain his showy court and carry through his reckless building program. But, as though this were not enough, he proceeded in his later years to offend the devout among the people by his too cordial attitude toward heathen gods.

Solomon undoubtedly worshiped Jehovah as the one God of the Hebrews. But neither he nor his father before him would have denied for a moment the real existence of the deities of other nations. To honor the gods of subject peoples was good state policy, for it kept these nations better satisfied. So Solomon built high places to the gods of Moab and Ammon, both of which had been conquered by David. It also seemed to him the part of wisdom to worship the divinities of his numerous foreign wives. This helped strengthen his alliances with

the nations from which they came. In all this the king would not feel that he was dishonoring Jehovah in the least, so long as he worshiped regularly at the various shrines sacred to him.

Some of Solomon's subjects, however, felt quite differently about the matter. They seem to have suspected that their king was not as loyal to the national god as he ought to be. Perhaps they were already witnessing the beginnings of those shameful customs and practices which, as a result of close contact with depraved heathen religions, crept in to defile the Jehovah worship. Certainly later history bears witness to the rapid increase of idolatry during the years immediately following Solomon. By his entangling alliances with foreign religions, Solomon seems to have set in motion those debasing influences against which the great social prophets later waged their unceasing warfare. These prophets found that their most difficult problem was to divorce the ethical religion of Jehovah from the low morals and vicious social customs of the very religions that Solomon fostered. Compromise in matters of religion and ethics may have seemed to the king good diplomacy—but it was not the truest wisdom.

Revolts of Hadad and Rezon.—Evidence of Solomon's weakness as compared with his father is afforded by his loss of control over Edom in the south, and by his trouble with Damascus in the north. Early in his reign both of these regions successfully asserted themselves against the peaceful, pleasure-loving son of David.

The difficulty with Edom had its roots back in the time of David's conquest of the land. In the process of crushing it, the great king seems to have lost many men in battle. Joab avenged their death by occupying the land for six months and killing off all the males whom he could capture. Certain members of the Edomite court, however, managed to rescue the young prince Hadad from this carnival of slaughter. Escaping to the wilderness of Paran in the south they made their way at last to Egypt. Here the reigning Pharaoh received the prince with a display of great cordiality. Hadad was made a member of the court, and was given in marriage the sister of the queen. His son was brought up as the playmate of Pharaoh's sons.

One day there came news of David's death. This made Hadad restless. A little later Joab's tragic end was announced. Then Hadad could restrain himself no longer. He hastened to Pharaoh. "Let me depart so that I may go to my own country," he begged. Pharaoh objected, "What do you lack with me, that you now seek your own country?" Hadad insisted that he must go. Perhaps Pharaoh was not altogether unwilling that his protégé should stir up a little trouble for his too powerful neighbor. So he finally gave him permission to depart.

Hadad sped to Edom, where he quickly organized a revolt. Solomon was too weak or too busy with his building projects to offer much resistance. As a result the Hebrew yoke was broken from the

neck of Edom, and Hadad ruled independently over at least a portion of his father's domain.

Solomon's troubles with Damascus were due to a certain Rezon, a picturesque character who took advantage of the king's utter lack of skill as a warrior to assert himself. Earlier in life he had been attached to Hadadezer, king of the petty Syrian state of Zobah. When David, in the process of crushing the Ammonites, conquered his master, he made good his escape. Gathering about him a group of bandits, he became a powerful outlaw captain, much as David himself had been in his earlier days. When Solomon came to the throne Rezon appeared and captured Damascus. From this stronghold he menaced the peace all through the life of Solomon. Like Hadad in Edom, he seems to have carved off for himself a liberal slice of Solomon's territory. Apparently he was the founder of the powerful Aramean kingdom of Damascus, which during the next two centuries continued to be Israel's bitterest enemy and most dangerous rival. Had Solomon been inclined to divert some of the wealth and manpower of the nation from his own vainglorious enterprises to the national defense, he might have saved himself and his successors untold trouble during many years to come.

Jeroboam's Revolt.—But the most convincing proof of Solomon's folly in handling affairs of state is found in the case of Jeroboam. This fine young patriot, as we shall see later, was driven by his own wrongs and those of his countrymen into open

revolt. So oppressive had Solomon's actions become that it was difficult for right-thinking men to remain loyal to him. Jeroboam, therefore, decided that he could best serve his country by rebelling against its ruler. Although the revolt was quelled during Solomon's lifetime, immediately after his death it split the nation in two.

Estimate of Solomon.—After a reign of almost forty years, Solomon died about the year 933 B.C. Ruling with an iron hand, he had achieved certain definite results. He had transformed Jerusalem from a rough military stronghold into a city of superlative beauty. By erecting the temple he had given new dignity and beauty to the worship of Jehovah. Throughout the reign his mighty fortresses guarded against invasion. Except for the loss of Edom and Damascus, he had retained intact the kingdom inherited from his father. The organization of national finances and the development of foreign trade had enormously increased the resources of the state. Art and literature flourished under his liberal patronage. The Hebrew nation took a position of leadership among its neighbors. It reached the acme of material growth both as regards the amount of its internal wealth and the extent of its territory. Outwardly all was well and the promise for the future even brighter.

Beneath the surface, however, disintegrating forces were at work. Even before Solomon's death the nation had begun to fall apart of its own weight. Little enthusiasm of loyalty held it together—mainly tyrannical force. By exorbitant demands

that did not stop short of enslavement Solomon almost entirely destroyed the affection of his subjects. Overweening ambition for display led him into reckless spending of the hard-won wealth of the citizens. His absorption in his own designs and his consequent disregard of the best interests of the nation tended to undo the self-sacrificing, constructive work of his father. The fine promise of Solomon's youth had given way to a mad folly that has darkened his great fame.

At Solomon's death the pent-up volume of popular discontent broke through all barriers, and the deluge came. In the light of the outcome of his life and work, it is clear that he whom tradition calls the "wisest of men" was in some respects as foolish a king as ever encumbered a throne.

Biblical passages: I Kings 3; 10; 11.

CHAPTER XVI

JEROBOAM'S REVOLT AGAINST AUTOCRACY

The Records.—For information concerning the persons and events we are now studying, we turn first of all to the two books of Kings. These were written after the great Deuteronomic reform of the seventh century B.C. and are deeply influenced by that important religious movement. The authors (or better, compilers or editors) did not write a straightforward, independent account of events as they understood them. Instead, like most ancient historians, they quoted passages from older documents, sometimes entire, sometimes abbreviated, sometimes in summary form. Three of their original sources are mentioned by name: (1) the Acts of Solomon; (2) the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah; (3) the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Beside these they seem to have had a Temple Chronicle, and also several biographies of prophets (e. g., those of Elijah and Elisha). Like the editors of the book of Judges, they adopted a somewhat monotonous fixed formula to introduce and conclude the account of each reign.

In addition to Kings we possess three other sources of information about the period: (1) the

Old Testament books of Chronicles, written about 250 B.C., by a priest who strongly emphasized ritual and who, therefore, needs to be supplemented or corrected from the other sources; (2) the sermons and addresses of prophets like Amos and Hosea, who give us first-hand information about events and conditions of their times; (3) inscriptions and records from Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt and Palestine, of great importance as furnishing independent accounts of certain periods of the history. By carefully weighing and balancing the testimony of all these sources, scholars are able to give us a pretty clear idea of the course of events.

Jeroboam's First Revolt.—Brief mention has already been made of Jeroboam. This rebellious patriot was the son of a widow of Ephraim. From the times of the Judges the tribe of Ephraim had been noted for its passionate love of freedom. While still a youth Jeroboam, with others from his tribe, had been conscripted under Solomon for service in one of the labor gangs engaged in strengthening the defenses of Jerusalem. His ability and industry attracted the favorable notice of the king, who soon raised him from the ranks to the important post of head overseer of the workers from Ephraim.

Royal favor and promotion served only to strengthen Jeroboam's inborn love of independence. Like Moses in Egypt, he longed for an opportunity to deliver his people from the lash of the taskmaster. His new duties as overseer gave him a certain position of leadership among his own tribes-

men. This he was prepared to use to advantage when the proper time should come.

Again and again in ancient Israel it was the prophets who started popular revolutionary movements against strongly entrenched autocracy. It was so now. Ahijah, a prophet from Shiloh, where the youthful Samuel had served before the ark of Jehovah, was an enlightened religious leader. He had come to feel that Solomon's policy of oppression, extravagance and idolatry must be stopped. Like Samuel before him, he sought a leader for the struggle that was coming.

One day he met Jeroboam walking along a road outside Jerusalem. The prophet had prepared for the encounter by dressing himself in a new garment. He called the overseer aside from the crowded highway into a field where they could be alone. Then he went through a strange performance. He took hold of his new garment and tore it into twelve pieces. Ten of these he handed to Jeroboam with the command: "Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says Jehovah, 'Behold I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you.' " The meaning of this symbolic action was at once clear to Jeroboam. He accepted the word of the prophet as a divine call to free the ten northern tribes.

We are unfortunately left in the dark as to the exact manner in which Jeroboam started his revolt. That he did undertake the difficult task assigned to him is quite certain. But the time was not yet ripe for a successful uprising—Solomon had too firm a

hold on the reins of government. When the king sought to kill him Jeroboam had to flee for his life to Egypt, where endangered Hebrews had often found refuge. Arrived in Egypt he received a warm welcome and protection from the ruling Pharaoh, Shishak I.

In this safe haven Jeroboam was not idle. While biding his time until the death of King Solomon should pave the way for a successful revolution and a possible change of dynasty, he kept in close touch with the disaffected leaders in Northern Israel.

At length Solomon passed away. Word was immediately sent to Jeroboam in Egypt that it was now safe to return. He settled in his native town of Zeredah. There he remained in retirement while awaiting the call to action.

Revolt of Northern Tribes.—Rehoboam, Solomon's son, prepared to succeed his father as king over all Israel. Judah accepted him without protest. The northern leaders, however, insisted on their right to accept or reject the new king as they pleased. Forty years earlier they had been willing to accept Solomon as David's nominee for the throne. But it was not at all their understanding that in so doing they had accepted the dynasty of David as their rulers for all time. Their bitter experience with Solomon's despotic reign had taught them caution. The consequence was that Rehoboam did not find such smooth sailing in the north as he had expected. He was met by a bold demand that he reverse the policies of his father.

Excessive taxation and forced labor were the main questions at issue. "Your father," the northern leaders complained, "made our yoke severe. Now, therefore, make lighter the severe service of your father and the heavy yoke which he put upon us, and we will serve you." Notice that the people did not demand the entire removal of their burdens—only that these should be made more reasonable. It was made clear that, unless Rehoboam met their demands at least half way, the North was determined to reject him.

Rehoboam wanted time to think about this proposition, and to talk it over with his advisers. So he answered, "Come back in three days." When they had gone he consulted the older and more experienced men, who had witnessed the failure of Solomon's methods. They advised him to be conciliatory and give heed to the complaint. But he thought this counsel rather tame. So he turned to the head-strong younger men who had grown up with him in the unreal and degenerating atmosphere of the court. These reckless young fellows felt only contempt for the popular democratic aspirations. Their advice was to defy the people. Rehoboam decided to accept this hot-headed counsel of his playmates and boon companions.

On the third day he was quite ready with his answer. "My finger is thicker than my father's loins," he said bluntly. "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." It was evident that the new

king intended to be much more despotic than Solomon had ever dreamed of being.

This insolent reply so infuriated the tribesmen of the North that they at once broke forth into open rebellion. The old war-cry with which Sheba had headed the last great revolt against the dynasty of David was revived:

> "What share have we in David?
> And we have no portion in the son of Jesse.
> To your tents, O Israel!
> Now look to your house, O David."

Thus did the northern kingdom declare its independence of Judah.

The fatuous king made the fatal mistake of sending Adoniram, chief overseer of the forced labor and, therefore, the best hated man in the kingdom, to quell the uprising. Enraged by the sight of their task-master the rebels forthwith stoned him to death. All that saved Rehoboam from a like fate was his speedy and ignominious flight to Judah. When he proposed to recover the lost territory by force of arms the prophet Shemaiah dissuaded him. Barren Judah, and those parts of Benjamin that could easily be controlled from Jerusalem, were all that remained of Rehoboam's splendid realm.

Up to this point Jeroboam seems to have had no active part in the proceedings. Now, however, he was called out from his retirement to head the movement. As the organizer of the earlier revolt against Solomon, he was the popular candidate for

the throne. So he came to Shechem and was anointed king over the ten northern tribes, just as Ahijah had predicted.

Causes of the Disruption.—There were three direct causes of the revolt and the resulting division of the kingdom: (1) the resentment of the north at the terrific drain of men and money for Solomon's extravagant building projects; (2) the idolatry of Solomon and his worship of foreign gods, which had lost him the devotion of the more religious among his subjects; (3) the incredible short-sightedness of Rehoboam, which drove the people into the arms of Jeroboam. But more fundamental than any of these reasons was the ancient feud between north and south. This breach, as we have seen, had its beginnings in the days of the conquest of the land, when each group had independently won its own territory. It was never entirely healed.

The very formation of the land was such as to magnify the differences between the two sections. A beneficent providence had favored the north with broad, fertile valleys. It was open to the traffic of traders and the march of armies. These conditions developed a prosperous and luxury-loving population, extremely resentful of restraint. Judah, on the contrary, lay comparatively isolated on a barren plateau. It was easily defended and difficult of access. The land nourished a rugged type of manhood, narrow, austere, and intensely religious. The influence of such contrasted environments in developing diverse types of civilization and religion can hardly be overestimated. Small wonder, then,

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Jeroboam's Capital at Shechem

that the boorish speech and actions of Rehoboam snapped the fragile bond that held together the rival sections of the land.

Effects of the Disruption.—A new epoch of Hebrew history was ushered in by the disruption of the kingdom. Instead of the one strong, dominating kingdom of Solomon, there now existed side by side two small monarchies, only slightly superior to those round about them. The northern kingdom had much the larger population and several times the territory of the south. The southern kingdom, on the other hand, was, as already explained, much more easily defended against invasion. It also enjoyed valuable prestige in that it retained Jerusalem and the temple, as well as having the dynasty of great King David on its throne.

As was to be expected, civil war was soon in full swing between the two petty kingdoms. Alliances and counter-alliances were eagerly sought for and as readily exchanged for others. Both Israel and Judah were soon too exhausted to offer effectual resistance to outside attack. The inevitable result was the final extinction of both kingdoms as independent powers. Assyria destroyed the north; her successor, Babylonia, absorbed the south. The disruption spelled suicide for both kingdoms.

That something like this might easily happen must have been evident to Ahijah and others of the prophetic party who were backing the revolution. But they had counted the cost and decided that what they were fighting for was worth even this. To gain freedom and keep alive the democratic

spirit was, they felt, infinitely more important than saving the state. They knew that if Rehoboam and his clique were permitted to continue unchecked in their course, the free spirit of the nation would soon be crushed under the heel of a typical oriental despotism.

It must always be remembered, moreover, that suffering is not without its compensations. It was so with the Hebrew kingdoms. Their religious life was quickened and refined by the experiences through which they had to pass after the disruption. The terrible ordeals they endured during the succeeding centuries lifted them to higher conceptions of Jehovah and to finer insights into ethical and religious truth. Thus it came to pass that these scattered folk became the spiritual teachers of all mankind. Tortured, persecuted, oppressed, exiled, enslaved, bereft of all hope of national power, they learned to look for enduring satisfaction to those spiritual joys which do not fade away. In God they found the peace and rest man denied them. Shortly after the disruption a great poet, firmly confident of divine help, voiced his faith in the nation's future in these lines:

"The eternal God is thy dwelling place
And underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut. 33:27.)

Biblical passages: I Kings 11:26-40; 12:1-24.

THE KINGDOMS OF
JUDAH & ISRAEL
with the
LANDS OF THE CAPTIVITIES
Statute Miles
0
50
100
THE GREAT SEA
S Y R I A
Damascus
Hamath
Arpad
Tiphsah
Reseph
Halah
Nineveh
Resen
Calah
Ashur
Anah
Ivah
Sepharvaim
Cathah
BABYLON
Elbasar
Euphrates R.
Persian
Gulf
Ecbatana Nth
Ecbatana Sth
Shushan
Moabites
Edomites
Jerusalem
Samaria
Shechem
Jezreel
Bethel
Mount Ibah
Mount Ibah
Hazor
Carchemish
Petiah
Haran
Tigris
Euphrates R.
Habor
Ghozan
Rhagus
Caspian Sea
34
36
38
40
42
44
46
48
30
32
34
36

CHAPTER XVII

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

Dates of the Kings

Israel	Judah
Jeroboam I, 933-912	Rehoboam, 933-916
	Abijam, 916-914
	Asa, 914-873

The Names Israel and Judah.—Israel had been the name of the united Hebrew kingdom during the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon. One would naturally expect to find this name retained by Rehoboam after the division of the kingdom; for he was the legitimate successor of David, and Jerusalem was his capital. But the curious fact is that Jeroboam calmly took the name Israel for his rebel kingdom. He was able to make good his claim to it because of the fact that his realm comprised the greater area of territory and a majority of the population. Rehoboam was thus forced to adopt a new name for his shrunken domain. Since Judah was by far his most important tribe, he named his kingdom after it. The situation is somewhat as though the states that seceded from the Union in 1861 had called themselves the United States of America, and the northern states had been

obliged to adopt some such name as the State of New York.

In later times we find the names Israel and Judah used very loosely. Israel is applied sometimes to the northern kingdom, sometimes to the whole Hebrew people, and sometimes even to the southern kingdom. In like manner Judah may mean either the kingdom or the tribe of Judah. It often becomes rather confusing.

I. Israel

The Real Jeroboam.—It was Jeroboam's misfortune that he could not choose his own biographer. He seems to have been a genuine patriot and a zealous worshiper of Jehovah. And yet he is unsparingly condemned in Kings as a wicked rebel and an apostate from the true faith. The reason for this lies in the fact that the editors who put these books into their present form belonged, not to the northern kingdom, but to Judah. By their time, three centuries after Jeroboam, Judah had come to regard herself as the only true people of Jehovah. If proof of this were needed, Judah maintained, it was to be found in the fact that Jehovah had allowed the northern kingdom to perish in 722 B.C. Jeroboam had launched his rebellion, it was felt, against the divinely appointed ruler of the nation. Who could deny, then, that he was a rebel, and a wicked apostate to boot?

His religious zeal was misjudged as heresy be-

cause it was measured according to the standards of the late Deuteronomic law. Naturally he could hardly obey a law that first came into being centuries after his time. We realize this and, therefore, judge him less harshly than did his Biblical biographer; we credit him with the honor really due him.

If we compare the opinions held in different sections of the United States regarding the outstanding personality of the Civil War—Abraham Lincoln—we shall be helped to an understanding of the divergent attitudes toward this Hebrew leader of old. Or, if we should read a German biography of Marshal Foch, we would get a clearer conception of the fact that a Judean biography of Jeroboam might not give an exact, impartial likeness of him.

Jeroboam's Religious Activity.—The first act of the new king was to fortify his capital Shechem against possible attack. In addition, he strengthened the defenses of Penuel beyond Jordan as a place of refuge for the court in case of need. This done, he turned to the task of appointing official places of worship for the citizens of the north.

Among the many sanctuaries of Israel two were especially renowned: Bethel, located in the extreme south, and Dan, situated in the far north of the kingdom. The former was connected with Jacob's vision of the heavenly ladder, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. The memorial stone which he had consecrated at that time was doubtless still an object of reverence there. The sanctuary at Dan traced back its sacred char-

acter to the early days of the settlement of the land. Its chief attraction was its possession of the images of Jehovah which, old tradition said, had been stolen from Micah in the days of the Judges. The fact that its priests could trace back their ancestry to Moses gave it added fame.

Jeroboam set up in each of these sanctuaries the image of a golden bull. This symbol seems to have been very commonly used in Semitic religions to represent the Deity. Aaron had used it in the worship of Jehovah; the cherubim over the ark were possibly similar in form. Later times learned to loathe and forbid such images because of their association with the vile Baal worship. But in Jeroboam's time the nation did not yet worship God after the manner of the second commandment. That the king did earnestly intend these images to honor Jehovah is evident from his words: "Behold your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

According to the record, the king set up these images because he feared the people would be won back to Rehoboam if they worshiped at the Jerusalem temple. It is possible that this shrewd motive may have had something to do with his action, and that he desired to make the worship at the northern sanctuaries so popular that people would not care to visit the more pretentious temple at Jerusalem. But there is no reason to suppose that people from the more distant parts of the land had ever been in the habit of journeying to Jerusalem for worship. Why should they, when more ancient

and revered sanctuaries were nearer at hand? Jeroboam had no need to fear the Jerusalem temple. What he wanted to do was to make more dignified and splendid the worship at the chief northern sanctuaries. For this he is entitled to praise, not blame. As a result of his fostering care Bethel and Dan, as royal sanctuaries, speedily came to occupy in Israel the place of preëminence which was accorded in Judah to Solomon's temple.

Besides thus caring for the two principal shrines, Jeroboam made generous provision for the other sanctuaries and high places in the north. He also appointed priests from among the people on the basis of personal fitness rather than birth or tribal affiliations. This was in entire accord with the practice of David and Solomon. He definitely fixed the date of the great harvest festival a month later than it was observed in Judah. In this he was probably conforming to the regular custom of the northern tribes. As the religious head of the nation, he was accustomed to offer public sacrifices on feast days. All this interest directed toward matters of religion casts a most favorable light on the character of the king. He thereby proved himself a zealous servant of Jehovah. Unfortunately, however, in making Israel independent of Judah, he incidentally increased the ill-feeling between the two sections.

The Man of God from Judah.—One of the strangest stories in the Old Testament centers about the altar of Bethel at this period. It comes from a very late date, is full of miraculous hap-

penings, and shows that the feeling against Jeroboam came to be extremely bitter in the south.

One day as the king was standing beside the altar at Bethel to burn incense, an unnamed man of God from Judah rebuked him to his face for his religious innovations. The prophet predicted that King Josiah (born three centuries later) should one day desecrate this illegal altar by burning men's bones upon it. When the indignant king put forth his hand as a signal to seize the fellow, it was paralyzed; the altar was also broken so that the ashes poured out. In answer to the prophet's prayer the hand was healed again. When Jeroboam offered to reward him the man refused even to eat or drink in Bethel—Jehovah had forbidden him to do so.

An old prophet at Bethel was told by his sons about this strange event. Saddling his ass, he started in pursuit of the mysterious messenger. When he caught up with the prophet he falsely asserted that an angel of God had commanded that he should give him bread and water in his home. Thus persuaded, the Judean returned and dined with the old prophet in Bethel. But while they ate, the old prophet really did receive a revelation. He predicted for his guest speedy death because of his failure to obey the divine command to abstain from eating and drinking while in Bethel.

As the Judean was returning home, a lion met him on the road and killed him, thus fulfilling the prediction. Passers-by came to Bethel with a tale about seeing a lion standing beside a corpse. When

the old prophet heard it he knew it must be the man from Judah. He went out and found both a lion and an ass standing beside the dead man. The lion, strangely enough, had neither eaten the corpse nor molested the ass. Bringing the body into the city, the old prophet buried it in his own sepulcher. He confirmed the prediction of the man of God against Bethel and all the high places of the north, and asked that at his death he might be buried with him.

Three centuries later Josiah destroyed the altar and high places at Bethel. On that occasion the tomb of the man of God was pointed out to him and the strange legend repeated. When or how this tale arose nobody knows. One scholar has suggested that perhaps the visit to Bethel of the prophet Amos in 750 B.C. gave rise to the story.

Sickness and Death of Jeroboam's Son.—Still another tale to the discredit of Jeroboam was repeated in later times in the kingdom of Judah. According to this account the king was rejected by the prophet Ahijah, the very man who had summoned him to his task of revolt.

It seems that the prince Abijah was very sick. Jeroboam sent his wife, disguised as a woman of the people, to the prophet in order to inquire how the illness would turn out. Ahijah was now aged and blind, so that it ought to have been fairly easy for the mother to conceal her identity. But Jehovah warned the prophet of the approaching visit, and told him what to say.

Thus forewarned, Ahijah knew who was at the

door as soon as he heard her step. Calling her in, he told the unhappy woman that her child would die. Nor was this all. Jeroboam's religious policy had been so wicked, he declared, that Jehovah was about to bring the whole family to a miserable end and put another dynasty on the throne. The narrative ends with the death of the boy just as the poor mother was about to enter her own home.

As a matter of fact, the sins for which Jeroboam is condemned and rejected were simply the usual religious customs of his time. Judah worshiped Jehovah in precisely the same fashion as did Israel, and King Rehoboam is blamed by the editor of Kings for the same transgressions as is Jeroboam. High places, sacred stone pillars, sacred poles, and even religious prostitutes had all come to be part of the Jehovah worship. It was only in more enlightened times that these features were rejected and the worship centralized at Jerusalem.

II. Judah

Rehoboam's Weak Reign.—Rehoboam was a weak king. The braggart attitude that lost him the better half of his kingdom was part and parcel of his inherent mental and moral flabbiness. He patterned after the weaknesses of Solomon in his love of luxury and extravagant display. The palace and harem interested him more than the battlefield or the council of state. To be sure, we read that "there was war between Rehoboam and

Jeroboam continually." But it was ineffectual war, at least so far as Judah's chances of reconquering the northern tribes were concerned.

Nor can any religious advance be credited to Rehoboam. Judah under him was decadent in this as in other respects. Unfortunately Rehoboam's incompetence seemed to dominate the next two centuries. During all those years, with rare exceptions, little that was worthy of note was accomplished in the south. The great political and religious movements alike belonged to the northern kingdom. It was not Judah but Israel that opposed the Syrian and Assyrian advance, and that provided the theater for the prophetic activity of Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea.

Only five years after the division Rehoboam suffered a misfortune that extinguished his last spark of enterprise. Shishak, the Egyptian king who had befriended Jeroboam, had doubtless heard of the fabulous amount of gold accumulated by Solomon. The disorganized condition of the two quarreling kingdoms offered him the opportunity of seeking plunder and, incidentally, of restoring Egypt's ancient supremacy in Palestine. The Bible account informs us that he mastered Jerusalem and carried away the treasures of the temple and palace. Chief among his prizes were the five hundred golden shields made by Solomon. So important were these for state and temple ceremonies that Rehoboam at once had brass imitations made for the use of his footguards. The result of Shishak's invasion must have been to make Rehoboam peril-

ously poor for a time. But the kings of Judah always showed great skill in replenishing the treasury after such raids.

One would be inclined to suppose that Shishak would spare his friend Jeroboam. But the Egyptian records tell us a different story. Inscribed on the walls of the temple of Amon at Karnak are the names of the towns in Palestine that paid tribute to Shishak. Not only do the names of almost a hundred towns in Judah appear, but also sixty more in Israel. Evidently the Egyptian king's regard for Jeroboam did not save the Israelite king from the irksome necessity of paying tribute. Possibly, however, the tribute of Israel was paid without resistance, while Judah was compelled to deliver up after actual conquest. It seems that both of the kingdoms became for a time dependencies of Egypt.

Thus ended, after seventeen futile years, the inglorious reign of Rehoboam. His son, Abijam, inherited a kingdom greatly reduced in area, population and fighting strength. Worst of all, it had lost its independence.

Abijam and Asa.—Of Rehoboam's son and successor we know almost nothing. He reigned scarcely three years, and carried on the feud with Jeroboam which had been handed down to him. At his death his son Asa received the throne.

Asa did much during his long reign to restore the moral balance in Judah. He was one of the few kings the prophetic historian felt he could approve. Vigorous and courageous, he dared to fight the Canaanite practices that had corrupted religion

under his predecessors. He banished from the sanctuaries the demoralizing sacred prostitutes, and burnt at the brook Kidron a shameful heathen image made by the queen-mother. His zeal and devotion did much to increase the fame of Solomon's temple. As the subsequent history will show, however, his religious insight was by no means matched by equal farsightedness in affairs of state.

Biblical passage: I Kings 12:25 to 15:15.

CHAPTER XVIII

MILITARY USURPERS IN THE NORTH

ISRAEL
Nadab, 912-911
Baasha, 911-888
Elah, 888-887
Zimri, 887
Omri, 887-876
Ahab, 876-854

Changes of Dynasty in Israel.—In Judah the dynasty of David occupied the throne as long as the nation continued to exist. Israel, on the contrary, passed through hectic experiences in the matter of rulers. During the fifty years immediately following the division, for example, four distinct dynasties occupied the throne in turn. Three out of six kings died a violent death.

The underlying cause of this unhappy state of affairs was the presence of a large army. This had been formed during the earlier struggle for independence from Rehoboam, and continued to be necessary because of the conditions of anarchy that prevailed. The control of the state shifted from the civilian population to the military class. The throne was a mere football to be fought over by contending cliques in the army. No longer did the

ordinary citizen have anything to do with the choice of his king. The army faction that happened to be dominant imposed a sovereign upon him. In our own day we find similar chaotic conditions existing in China and certain American republics.

Nadab's Tragic End.—The first victim of this unsettled state of affairs was Nadab, son of Jeroboam. In a sense, his father was a remote cause of his death. His successful revolt had encouraged others to rebel whether they had just cause or not. Jeroboam himself had, indeed, been able, after a reign of twenty years, to hand on the kingdom to his son. But Nadab was less fortunate; within a bare two years he was slain.

He was at the time conducting a siege against Gibbethon, a frontier fortress of the Philistines. Among his officers was an ambitious general named Baasha. This unscrupulous conspirator organized a revolt in the army and killed the king. In order that there might be no one to contend with him for the throne he proceeded, with characteristic Eastern brutality and thoroughness, to exterminate all members of the line of Jeroboam. His work satisfactorily accomplished, the usurper became king. In such gory and generous fashion was fulfilled the prediction of Ahijah.

Dynasty of Baasha.—Baasha took vigorous hold of the kingdom he had so basely won. We soon find him busily at work fortifying Ramah, only five miles distant from Jerusalem. Naturally this was regarded by the southern kingdom as an insult and as a threat against her security. Asa, the reform-

ing king, was ruling Judah. In his fright he adopted a very short-sighted policy. He decided to call in outside aid against the sister kingdom.

Benhadad of Damascus, neighbor of Israel, seemed the most promising ally for his purpose. Gathering together all the gold and silver he could unearth in the national treasury and elsewhere, he sent them to Damascus with the request: "Go, break your league with Baasha, king of Israel, so that he may go away from me."

Benhadad willingly accepted the bribe, and immediately invaded Israel. Chief among the cities taken by him was Dan, home of the famous northern sanctuary. Baasha, thus threatened in the rear, was forced to retire from Ramah, leaving its fortifications uncompleted. Asa took advantage of this opportunity to seize the place. Calling in a large force of citizens, he set them to the task of levelling its defenses. With the stone and timber thus obtained he strengthened his own border fortresses of Geba and Mizpah. Apparently he did not dare attempt to hold Ramah permanently.

Doubtless Asa complimented himself on the success of his strategy. As a matter of fact he had stored up, both for his own and the northern kingdom, infinite trouble for future years. His payment was looked upon by Benhadad as an act of submission. He would, therefore, be expected to pay tribute regularly. And the war he had started was the beginning of a long series of contests between Damascus and Israel, which exhausted both and opened the way for conquest by the Assyrians.

Baasha was opposed by the prophetic party. Tradition tells us that a certain Jehu, son of Hanani, sternly rebuked him and predicted an evil fate for his house. After a reign of twenty-four years he died peacefully and was buried in Tirzah. This city had taken the place of Shechem as the capital of the north.

Upon Elah, his drunken son and successor, fell the doom predicted by the prophet. The army was again fighting the Philistines at Gibbethon. A conspiracy was formed against Elah by a certain Zimri, commander of half his chariots. One day while the royal drunkard was carousing in the home of his chamberlain at Tirzah, Zimri was admitted and assassinated him. Like Baasha before him, the murderer sought safety for himself by killing off all friends and relatives of the dead king. Thus ended the dynasty of Baasha. It was ushered in by murder; by the dagger it also departed.

Zimri's Seven-Day Reign.—Zimri made the fatal mistake of failing to take the army into account. No sooner had the soldiers before Gibbethon heard of his coup than they chose a rival usurper in the person of their commander Omri. This new candidate forthwith marched to besiege Zimri at Tirzah. Its defenses could not hold out against his forces. When the king saw that further resistance was hopeless, he entered the palace and burned it over his head. A brief seven days had elapsed between the slaying of Elah and the suicide of his murderer. Truly a short-lived dynasty! *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

Important Reign of Omri.—Omri's task did not end with the death of Zimri. A new aspirant for the throne, Tibni by name, attracted a large following. Again the ill-fated land witnessed the horrors of a long civil war. A decisive victory by the forces of Omri, and the death of his opponent, at length decided the bitter struggle for supremacy. A new and important dynasty thus comes on the stage.

We could wish that the Biblical historian had seen fit to hand down to us more information about the significant twelve-year reign of Omri. The one event that particularly interested our author was the transfer of the capital, in the middle of the reign, from Tirzah to the hill of Samaria. This was bought for two talents of silver from Shemer, from whom it, therefore, took its name.

Evidently Omri, like David, realized how important it was to have as capital a city that could easily be defended. Samaria was ideally located for this purpose. Built on a round isolated hill over three hundred feet high, it was separated from the encircling hills by deep valleys. When reinforced by a protecting wall, it could resist almost indefinitely the attacks of such engines of war as could be brought against it in those days. The history of the city in succeeding years shows how wisely Omri chose. Even the experienced and all-powerful Assyrian besiegers were obliged to sit before the city for three years before they finally took it in 722 B.C.

Besides being a wellnigh impregnable fortress,

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The Hill of Samaria

Samaria commended itself by the surpassing beauty of its situation. From its lofty walls and towers extended a glorious view westward for miles along the fertile valley, and thence over low purple hills to the ships of the blue Mediterranean twenty-three miles distant. Well could Isaiah later describe the city as,

> "The proud crown . . . of Ephraim,
> And the flower of his glorious beauty,
> Which crowns the fertile valley."

For a century and a half after his founding it contended with Jerusalem on fairly equal terms for supremacy and fame.

But Omri's sagacious choice of a capital was not his only nor principal claim to greatness. He was able to unite the jealous parties in his own land, and probably fought successfully against the Philistines. From outside sources we have excellent testimony to the impression he made on his own and later times. Until the fall in 722 B.C., the Assyrians continued to call the northern kingdom the "land of the house of Omri." Even Jehu, who overthrew the dynasty of Omri, was called by Shalmaneser III the "son of Omri."

The famous Moabite stone, erected by King Mesha of Moab, a contemporary of Omri's son and successor Ahab, also bears witness to the power of the king. On this stone, set up to commemorate a recent victory over the Hebrews, the Moabite king records that "Omri was king of Israel and he oppressed Moab many days, because Chemosh (the

Moabite god) was angry with his land. . . . Now Omri took possession of the land of Medeba and occupied it during his own days and half his son's days, forty years." Evidently Moab had broken away from Hebrew control and was regained by the warlike Omri. Following custom he imposed an enormous tribute, which was still being paid in the days of Ahab.

Additional proof of Omri's constructive statesmanship is offered by the alliances he formed with neighboring states. As in the case of Solomon, these political and commercial ties were cemented by marriages between the families of the rulers concerned. The most important of these marriages was that between Omri's son Ahab and Jezebel, a Sidonian princess. Although the religious consequences of this particular marriage were extremely harmful, we must recognize that it was an astute stroke of statecraft.

All the evidence points to the conclusion that Omri was both an able warrior and a shrewd statesman. Under his strong rule Israel was saved from anarchy and dissension, and began to occupy a position of leadership among the surrounding kingdoms.

Toward the north, however, the king met with reverses. The Syrians had by his time built up a powerful state with its capital in the oasis city of Damascus. By the terms of a most humiliating peace Omri was forced to cede to them certain of his cities, and also to reserve certain streets in the new capital, Samaria, for the use of Syrian mer-

chants. Very likely he also paid tribute in order to be spared from attack.

At the very end of Omri's reign the conquering Assyrian king, Ashurnazirpal, made his way unopposed to the Lebanons and the sea. It is possible that Omri joined the other small western kingdoms in paying him tribute. If so he was the first, but by no means the last, among the rulers of Israel, to buy off the invading Assyrian power.

Ahab.—At the death of Omri his son Ahab ascended the throne. An evil name has clung to this king because of his marriage to Jezebel. But many of the people of his own generation must have felt far more kindly toward him than did the group of prophets who opposed him. He really proved himself a strong ruler, superior to his able father and the equal of any of the kings Israel produced. As a broad-minded statesman and successful warrior he won the esteem of his subjects. He was able to open up markets for the surplus products of Israel, and to enrich the nation's life with elements from the older and more advanced civilizations about it. Our sympathies in the terrific religious struggle that surged backward and forward during his reign should not blind us to the great qualities and achievements of the man.

The various alliances into which he entered meant much for the material progress and enrichment of the nation. His marriage to Jezebel sealed a valuable compact with the Phœnicians, the foremost sailors and merchants among the ancients. After he had soundly beaten the Syrians (though

this may have been late in his reign), he made a mutually advantageous commercial treaty with these habitual foes of Israel. More significant still, he achieved a peace with Jehoshaphat, contemporary king of Judah, which he sought to make lasting by the marriage of his daughter Athaliah to prince Jehoram. This policy of conciliation was the finest sort of diplomacy, in that it served to divert the energies of the kingdom from exhausting wars to constructive enterprise. Under shelter of these compacts Israel was enabled to assume a leading position as a distributing center for the commerce and culture of the eastern Mediterranean.

Proof of the prosperity of the kingdom under Ahab is at hand in the amount of building he did. A number of cities were strengthened and fortified. With somewhat of Solomon's love of display the king erected at Samaria a luxurious palace richly decorated with ivory. Undoubtedly the enormous quantities of wool received as tribute each year from Moab and sold to the expert Phœnician weavers and dyers had something to do with his great wealth.

Were riches and material success the only or even the most important goal for a nation, Ahab's reign would have to be counted an unqualified success. But there were earnest men in Israel who saw that ideals were more precious than wealth or even so-called culture. They perceived that the stern desert morality of the Hebrews was breaking down in the enervating city life of the north. Contact with debased religions was lowering the ethical

standards of the people. Worst of all there was active a powerful and positive force for evil in the person of Queen Jezebel. She used all her influence to establish and spread the licentious worship of the Phœnician Baal, whose priest her father had been before he gained the throne of Tyre by assassination.

Jezebel's work as proselyter for Baal placed Ahab in a difficult position. He himself was a professed worshiper of the God of Israel and had no intention of changing his religion. Two facts prove this: (1) the names he gave his children contain the usual shortened form of the divine name Jehovah; (2) up to the very end of his reign he supported at court a band of four hundred prophets of Jehovah, whom he consulted before making important decisions.

But on the other hand he could see no particular harm in permitting the queen to worship her own god as she pleased. It was recognized custom in such international marriages for the wife's god to be allowed a place of honor. Solomon had made room in Jerusalem for the gods of his numerous wives. Why should not Ahab be as liberal? To honor these foreign gods was good policy, for it went far toward maintaining peace and good will with one's allies. The demand of the prophetic party that Ahab stamp out Baal worship must, therefore, have seemed to him the wild and senseless ravings of extreme fanatics. They apparently lacked the political vision to see that their program might breed trouble with Phœnicia.

There was still another potent reason for leaving well enough alone. Jezebel was an unusually strong-minded woman, not easily controlled or led. The easiest way to keep peace in the royal family was to let her go on.

"Go on" she did—and Ahab followed where she led. She was his evil genius. Under her wicked influence he committed acts of oppression that accorded well enough with the despotic spirit of Baalism, but which were entirely opposed to the democratic spirit of the Jehovah religion.

Bibical passage: I Kings 15:16 to 16:34.

CHAPTER XIX

ELIJAH, THE MAN WHO DARED TO STAND ALONE

Baal.—Baal means 'owner,' or 'proprietor,' or 'lord,' as, for example, the owner of a house or field. It also came to mean 'husband,' for a husband was regarded as the owner of his wife. When applied to a deity, the name signified that the god was proprietor of a certain place or the possessor of certain qualities.

In ancient Palestine there were many Baals. They were regarded as the local presiding divinities of sacred springs, trees, stones or places. While these nature gods varied somewhat in character, they were all believed to give fertility to the soil and increase to the flocks. Above all else they were gods of agriculture, and as such were closely connected with the ground, the rain and the sun. Also when children came to the home Canaanite parents were wont to praise their local Baal as the gracious giver.

Scattered over the land were the shrines and high places of the various Baals. Certain rites and customs, some good and some evil, were connected with these sacred places. At the spring and harvest festivals offerings from field and flock were brought in. Joyous dancing and feasting became the order

of the day. Unfortunately these occasions were marred by drunkenness and all sorts of immoral excesses.

From the day they entered the land the Hebrews came into constant contact with these neighborhood divinities. In those primitive days prophets had not yet arisen who could tell them that there was only one God over all creation. So they supposed that the Baals had a real existence. While the Canaanites taught the Hebrews to plow and sow and reap, they also taught many to pray to the Baals who, as they believed, gave the increase to the land. A large proportion of the Israelites were persuaded that these native gods knew more about farming than their own desert-dwelling Jehovah. Besides this, the Canaanite sanctuaries were so rich and attractive that the comparatively uncultured newcomers were dazzled. The austere worship of Jehovah failed to satisfy them.

After a time the Hebrews scattered among the Canaanites began to identify Jehovah with the local Baal. This was rendered easier by the circumstance that the name Baal, or Lord, could be applied easily to any divinity. Jehovah became the Hebrew Baal, differing in various localities much as does the Virgin Mary in widely separated Roman Catholic communities in our own day. The agricultural feasts and the many rites of the Canaanites became part of the Jehovah worship. Soon there was little distinction between Baal and Jehovah. Hebrew fathers were as ready to give their children names formed with Baal as with Jah, the abbreviated form

of Jehovah. The fact that Gideon bore the name Jerubbaal, while Saul and Jonathan and David named their sons Ishbaal, Meribbaal and Baaljada respectively, proves that the most loyal worshipers of Jehovah found nothing improper in using the name Baal as the title of their god. Nevertheless there was a real danger in this confusion between Jehovah, the Baal of Israel, and the other Baals of the land. The Hebrew god would soon lose his identity among the many gods of Canaan, whose sensual worship was a defiling influence upon the pure desert religion.

Not until the time of Jezebel, however, was any strong opposition offered to this state of affairs. Her violent introduction of Baal Melkart of Tyre stirred up bitter hatred for Baal worship in general, and made thoughtful men wonder whither the Jehovah religion was drifting. The peril in this case was not only religious—it was political as well. For this particular Baal differed from the rest in that he was the deity, not of an insignificant local shrine, but of a great national religion. It was easily possible that, once the Tyrian Baal had displaced Jehovah, the land of the Israelite god would also be annexed to Tyre. The alliance begun by David and Solomon might be transformed into Hebrew servitude. The autocratic spirit of Baalism was itself a menace to Israel's democratic institutions. So the problems that came to focus at this time were social and political as well as moral and religious.

Although King Ahab was blind to the fact, it

became at length painfully evident that something must be done if the Jehovah religion were not to perish from off the earth. It was either Jehovah or Baal. Both could not exist side by side, for the controlling spirit of each was absolutely and irrevocably hostile to the other. Baal was immoral, Jehovah moral. Baal was sensual, Jehovah spiritual. Then, too, Jehovah was a jealous god who would tolerate no rival in the affections of his own people. Which of these two masters would the nation serve? It was Elijah's mission to see that it chose aright.

The Elijah Stories.—Breaking in upon the somewhat monotonous historical records of the books of Kings are the chapters containing the memoirs of Elijah. Instead of prosy politics, we find here mystery and tensely dramatic situations. Here, gathered about the imposing figure of the great spokesman of Jehovah, are fascinating popular stories. Some of them may exaggerate the marvels he accomplished. But through all the rose colors of later devout imagination we can still trace clearly the outlines of a spiritual and moral giant. In his presence the king pales into insignificance. Earthly potentates are as nothing beside this valiant champion of the Most High.

This uncouth prophet bursts forth from Gilead, that hilly borderland between the desert of Israel's early wanderings and her settled abode. His manner of life and his garb reveal the inhabitant of the wilderness. Able to subsist on the scantiest of food, he can also, like a true Bedouin, move with

incredible speed from place to place. His principal garment is a rough hairy mantle of skin, which seems to have remained one of the marks of the prophetic order down to the time of John the Baptist. His ideals are the simple ethical ones of the desert. Even his name is significant, for Elijah means "Jehovah is my God." For the luxurious agricultural civilization of Canaan, shot through with corruption and sensuality, he has only loathing and contempt. To Ahab he must have seemed the incarnation of all that was fanatical and narrow. It was inevitable that these two men, so positive and so far asunder in their convictions, should sometime come to an open break.

Message to Ahab.—Suddenly this odd-looking individual swooped upon Ahab with the startling message, "As Jehovah, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except according to my word." The meaning of this prediction was plain. The people had come to believe that the Baals controlled the rain; the coming drought would teach them that Jehovah was the true giver of rain and fruitful seasons.

Elijah disappeared as mysteriously as he had come. At Jehovah's command he hid himself in the ravine of the Cherith, which flows into the Jordan from the east. In this refuge the ravens miraculously brought him bread and flesh each morning and evening. After he had lived in this fashion for some time, the drought in the land grew so severe that the stream dried up and it became necessary to move on.

Widow of Zarephath.—Jehovah now instructed him to go to Zarephath, a Phœnician town on the sea-coast between Tyre and Sidon. At the gate of the city he found a widow gathering sticks. "Bring me, please, a little water in a vessel," he called to her. Then, as she was starting, he added, "and a bit of bread." But she turned and replied, "I have nothing but a handful of meal in the jar and a little oil in the jug; and see, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." Nevertheless Elijah told her to make him a little cake first, and then prepare food for herself and her son. "For," said he, "thus says Jehovah, the God of Israel, 'The jar of meal shall not be used up, nor shall the jug of oil fail, until the day that Jehovah sends rain upon the ground.'"

The woman did as he said, and found that he had spoken truly. During all the time that he lodged in her house the meal and oil did not give out, no matter how much was used.

After awhile the widow's son sickened and died. Wild with grief and despair, she came to the prophet. He took the lifeless body out of her arms and carried it to his own upper room, where he laid it on the bed. Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, crying out as he did so, "O Jehovah, my God, I pray thee, let this child's life come back to him again." His prayer was answered and the lad was restored to life. He at once carried him down to the sorrowing mother with the joyful announcement, "See, your son is alive."

Elijah's Reappearance Before Ahab.—So three terrible years of drought and famine passed by. Ahab vainly searched far and wide for the hated prophet who, he felt, had brought this misery on the land. Jezebel, meanwhile, hunted down the prophets who sided with Elijah. By her instructions Jehovah's altars were thrown down, and those of his spokesmen who could not find a place to hide were slain. And yet, even at court, there were those who sympathized with the reformers. Obadiah, the palace steward, was one of these. When the persecution was fiercest he, at the risk of his life, hid a hundred prophets in a cave and fed them with bread and water.

The drought became so severe that even the king and this steward went out in search of water and grass to keep the royal horses and mules alive. Ahab went one way and Obadiah in the opposite direction. Suddenly the prophet, so long sought by the angry king, appeared before Obadiah. The steward recognized him and bowed down to the ground.

"Go," commanded the prophet, "tell your master Elijah is here." "No," objected the steward, "as soon as I am gone from you the spirit of Jehovah will carry you I know not whither; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and I cannot find you, he will put me to death." But Elijah assured him: "As Jehovah of hosts lives, whom I serve, I will surely show myself to him today."

So Obadiah hastened after Ahab and brought him to Elijah. "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"

was the king's greeting when they met. "I have not troubled Israel," was Elijah's reply, "but you and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commands of Jehovah and have gone after the Baals. Now, therefore," he concluded, "send out and gather to me all Israel to Mount Carmel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal who eat at Jezebel's table." Thus they parted.

Contest on Carmel.—Mount Carmel stands apart, glorious in beauty, beside the everchanging waters of the Mediterranean. Its wooded slopes are visible from all parts of Israel and are easy of approach. From its summit there spreads abroad one of the sublimest views of earth and sea and sky to be found anywhere. In Elijah's time the famous hill was consecrated to fruitful Baal. Jehovah, too, had an altar there. How appropriate it was, then, that the prophet should choose these heights, sacred in the traditions of both rival faiths, as a theater for the supreme struggle between Baal and Jehovah.

To this spot thronged the people of Israel on that momentous day of decision. Against the four hundred and fifty devotees of Baal stood one lone man as the champion of Jehovah—the gaunt ascetic from Gilead. His appeal to the nation rang out over land and sea, "How long will you go limping between the two sides? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."

No answer from the people! So the prophet proposed a test to determine which was the true God. Two bullocks were to be cut in pieces and

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Plain of Esdraelon and Mount Carmel

laid on fire-wood, one by the Baal worshipers and the other by Elijah. "Call on your God," he offered, "and I will call on Jehovah. The God who answers by fire, he is the God." "Well spoken!" said the people.

First the prophets of Baal prepared the sacrifice upon their altar. From morning until noon they leaped and writhed about the altar in their religious dances crying, "O Baal, hear us!" No response came during all the weary hours. At midday Elijah taunted them. "Cry aloud," he suggested mockingly, "for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey; perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." The dervish prophets gave themselves to still wilder excesses of frenzy. They shouted and raved and cut themselves with swords and lances according to their custom, until the blood gushed out. When the hour came for the evening sacrifice they were still at it. All day long they had called on a god who could neither hear nor answer.

Then Elijah took hold. He summoned the people and repaired the old altar of Jehovah which had been broken down. About it he built a trench. He laid the pieces of the bullock upon the wood. Then, in order to avoid all suspicion of fraud, he had four jars filled with water and poured over the sacrifice and wood. This was done three times until all was saturated and the trench full of water.

"Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me," was the prayer he offered, "that this people may know that thou, Jehovah, art God." A wonderful thing happened.

Fire fell like a lightning flash out of the sky and consumed the sacrifice and the wood and even the stones and dust, and licked up the water in the trench. The multitude fell to the ground in awe and terror, crying out, "Jehovah, he is God; Jehovah, he is God." Then, at Elijah's command, the people seized the prophets of Baal, brought them down to the river Kishon below the mountain, and killed every one.

Turning to Ahab, Elijah promised him that the needed rain would soon be forthcoming in great abundance. While the king ate in his tent, the prophet climbed to the seaward headland of Carmel to watch for the expected rain. There he sat deep in prayer, bent forward with face between his knees. "Go up now, look toward the sea," he directed his servant. "There is nothing," announced the man. Elijah commanded, "Go again seven times." The seventh time the servant reported a cloud, small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea. The prophet sent him to Ahab with the message, "Make ready your chariot and go down, so that the rain may not stop you." The next moment the sky was black with clouds and the rain was descending in floods on the thirsty ground. As Ahab drove full speed in his chariot to Jezreel through the driving storm, Elijah ran before him in religious ecstasy the whole seventeen miles. It was a marvelous exhibition of speed and endurance, another evidence of his God-given powers.

Jehovah had won a complete victory over Baal that momentous day on Mount Carmel. He had

proved his control over the rain, the very element which Baal, as the god of fruitfulness, was supposed to rule. Baal was revealed as impotent in his own land, while Jehovah had shown that he could come to the help of his people in the cultivated land no less than in the desert. He had demonstrated his right to the undivided allegiance of the nation.

But it takes more than a rain storm to break up a nation's bad habits. No physical miracle, however impressive, can avail to change the hearts and minds of men. The drama enacted on Carmel was the beginning, but only the beginning, of a long process of education by Elijah. He had yet to teach and labor for many years before the truth finally triumphed. Only by using every available weapon, political as well as spiritual, was he able to banish Baal and enthrone Jehovah as sole God of Israel. Thus the scene at Carmel may be said to be a summary of the whole life-work of the great champion of Jehovah.

The immediate after results of the Carmel episode, however, were bitterly disappointing. Defeat was skulking just around the corner, waiting to take intrepid Elijah off his guard.

Biblical passages: I Kings 17; 18.

CHAPTER XX

ELIJAH'S CONFLICT WITH KING AHAB

Elijah's Flight.—The wonderful events of the great day on Carmel failed to turn stubborn Queen Jezebel from her main life purpose. She was still determined to make Baal supreme in Israel, whatever the cost might be. But she was shrewd enough to see that Elijah had made such a powerful impression on the nation that it would hardly be safe to use violence on him. So she decided to get rid of him by frightening him out of the country. Calling a messenger, she sent word to the prophet, "I am going to kill you by tomorrow about this time." This threat terrified Elijah, and he was soon fleeing post-haste.

Why did Elijah run away from danger? Why did not this man, usually a very lion for courage, stay and fight? Just because he was very tired and very discouraged. Like most enthusiasts he was subject to violent extremes of feeling. After the fierce exaltation on Carmel he had fallen into a depressed mood. Jezebel's murderous message came at exactly the right moment to send him flying.

Revelation at Horeb.—Southward along the main highroad he hastened, until he reached the famous sanctuary of Beersheba. Here he was in Judean

territory, safely out of reach of the angry queen. Leaving his servant in the city he himself, true nomad that he was, pushed onward a day's journey into the solitary wilderness. As he went, his thoughts were far from cheerful. He reflected bitterly on the dismal failure that had followed swiftly on the heels of apparent victory. Utterly disenchanted, he prayed there in the lonely desert that he might die. "It is enough," he groaned, "now, O Jehovah, take away my life." Exhausted, he threw himself in the shade of one of the broom shrubs that dot these barren wastes. Soon he was fast asleep.

After he had rested a little while an angel touched him, saying, "Arise, eat." He awoke to find at his head a cake of bread and a jug of water. When he had eaten and drunk he again lay down and slept. Once more the angel aroused him. "Arise, eat," said he, "or the journey will be too long for you." A second time the prophet refreshed himself. Then he journeyed in the strength of that food forty days and nights until he reached Mount Horeb (Sinai). At this holy mountain, where Moses had received the Law, he felt closer to the God of Israel than he possibly could anywhere else.

Nor did the God who had previously satisfied his physical wants disappoint him now. A great spiritual experience came to inspire the weary prophet with hope and enthusiasm. As he lay hid in a cave, there passed by a stormy wind tearing the mountain asunder and breaking rocks in pieces; then the mountain shook with an earthquake; and after the

earthquake a fire appeared. But Jehovah was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. At last there came the sound of a low, gentle whisper; and Jehovah was in the whisper. This impressive object-lesson was God's way of reminding his servant that he is a spirit, and that only the least material of symbols can represent him. It was a great advance on the older idea that the violence of the storm, earthquake and lightning best showed what God was like.

When Elijah heard the divine whisper, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out to the entrance of the cave. A voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "The Israelites have forsaken you, and have slain your prophets with the sword. I only am left and they seek to take my life away from me."

Then Jehovah comforted his disheartened messenger. He assured him that there yet remained in Israel seven thousand faithful worshipers who had never bowed the knee to Baal nor kissed him. Better still, he gave him something to do. He commanded him to anoint Hazael as the coming king over the Syrian kingdom at Damascus, Jehu as king over Israel, and a certain Elisha as his successor in the prophetic office. These three were to inaugurate a campaign of assassination, revolution and war in order to complete the mission of Elijah and visit upon the faithless in Israel the vengeance of Jehovah. "Whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall slay; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall slay." This bloody

program shows how imperfectly even the noblest prophets of the time understood the voice and will of God.

Call of Elisha.—Circumstances seem to have prevented Elijah from himself anointing either Hazael or Jehu. These two commissions were left to his successor. But he did attend to the anointing of Elisha. This young man was the son of a well-to-do farmer of Abel-Meholah in the Jordan valley. Elijah found him out in the field with the servants, plowing with twelve pairs of oxen, he himself driving the last pair. Without uttering a word, Elijah cast his prophet's mantle upon him and then passed on.

Elisha did not need an explanation. He knew that this symbolic action meant that the famous prophet wanted him to be his follower. It took him but a moment to decide to obey this call of God. Running after Elijah, he begged only for permission to return and kiss his father and mother goodby. This was granted, and he turned back for a little while to bid farewell to his old life and associates. To mark his entrance upon the new and high task, he loosed the yoke of oxen from his plow and offered them as a sacrifice. When the sacrificial feast was over, he sought out Elijah and entered his service. Thus began his long and useful career as a prophet.

Naboth's Vineyard.—Adjoining Ahab's summer palace at Jezreel was the vineyard of a peasant named Naboth. Eager to add this piece of land to his own estates for use as a vegetable garden,

the king tried to buy it. He made his humble neighbor a generous offer, agreeing to give in exchange a better vineyard or else its value in cash. But the land had been in Naboth's family for many generations, and he loved it. So he refused to part with it. According to the democratic customs and laws of the land, he was entirely within his rights in doing this. Even the king had no legal power to force him to sell.

It was, however, a bitter pill for Ahab to swallow. Grown man and valiant warrior though he was, he entered his house and threw himself sulking on his bed, face to the wall. Like a spoiled child he even refused to eat. Jezebel found him in this condition a little later. "Why are you so ill-humored that you eat no food?" she inquired. "Because Naboth refuses to sell me his vineyard," he replied. "Are you governing Israel?" she scornfully asked. "Get up, eat and be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth."

Now in Jezebel's own city of Tyre, kings were accustomed to doing just about as they pleased. It vexed her that an ordinary Hebrew citizen should be so ridiculously bold as to oppose the will of his monarch. If the stubborn Naboth refused to sell or trade his land, so much the worse for him! She would teach him better manners.

So she wrote letters in Ahab's name to the local rulers of Jezreel, commanding them to get rid of Naboth. They were to arrest him and try him on a trumped-up charge of having cursed God and the king. For this crime the penalty was death. In

order to get the two witnesses necessary to secure a conviction, they were to hire a couple of worthless fellows to offer perjured testimony.

The mockery of a trial was held, and Naboth was pronounced guilty. So eager were the subservient elders of the town to please the queen that they publicly stoned Naboth's sons as well as the accused man himself. The property being thus left without a living heir, there remained no one to dispute with the king his right to appropriate it. This welcome news was sent to Jezebel. Turning to the king she said, "Take possession of the vineyard, for Naboth is dead." Ahab gladly obeyed. With two of his captains he rode off to obtain the desired piece of land.

News of the outrage traveled speedily throughout Israel. Elijah flamed up in righteous wrath. Hastening to Jezreel he suddenly appeared before startled King Ahab as he was inspecting his new property. At sight of him, all the self-satisfaction of the guilty king oozed away. He could only sigh, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Sternly the prophet answered, "I have. Have you murdered and also taken possession? In the place where the dogs licked Naboth's blood shall they lick your blood also."

Shocked to sanity by this bold threat, Ahab now realized how horrible had been the deed by which he had obtained the coveted field. He made every demonstration of repentance. After the fashion of the East he tore his clothes, fasted, wore the rough sackcloth of mourners next his skin, and

slept on sackcloth. The tradition tells us that Jehovah was so moved by the humility of the king that he postponed until the time of Ahab's son the doom predicted by Elijah.

Mount Carmel and Naboth's vineyard stand for two great services rendered by Elijah to the cause of Hebrew religion. At Carmel he fought against Baalism for the supremacy of the ethical Jehovah religion. Never after that did any considerable number of the Hebrews seriously question the right of their God to the undivided loyalty and love of all Israelites. At Naboth's vineyard, on the other hand, Elijah definitely linked up religion once more with social justice. He thus reaffirmed for all succeeding ages the ethical and democratic nature of Israel's religion. After him a glorious company of prophets carried onward the torch he had lighted.

First Syrian War.—Although selfish and materialistic, Ahab was no coward. In the course of the wars he fought to free his land from invasion and conquest he showed true heroism. Of his valor and ability as a fighter there can be no question. Nor, indeed, did he fail in those other qualities that go to make up a strong ruler: breadth of vision, sense of justice, shrewdness in trade and diplomacy, energy and decision of character. Except for the evil influence of Jezebel upon him he might have gone down in history as one of the most noble, as well as brilliant, of the monarchs of Israel.

It was in the Syrian wars that Ahab met his

supreme test. From his father Omri he had inherited an extremely difficult situation. That monarch, it will be remembered, able though he was, had been obliged to yield a number of cities in the north to Benhadad of Damascus. He likewise gave up certain streets in Samaria for the use of Syrian merchants. It seems that he was also obliged to pay tribute. The supreme task of Ahab was to shake off this Syrian yoke. Apparently, however, he continued to pay tribute during the greater part of his reign. It was only in the closing years that he felt strong enough to take up the gage of battle.

Benhadad finally forced the issue. For some obscure reason he invaded Israel with a formidable army. Arrived before Samaria he insolently sent messengers to Ahab to remind him of his vassalage; furthermore, he demanded that Ahab give up the palace and city for plunder by the Syrian troops. Ahab was willing to yield to any reasonable requirement. But the order to open up the city to the horrors of sack was more than he could endure. Summoning the elders of the city he stated the facts to them. Their verdict was: "Do not listen nor consent." So Ahab sent reply to his besieging overlord, "This thing I cannot do."

When this message was brought to Benhadad, he answered with the boast that he possessed troops enough to pound Samaria into dust and carry it away in handfuls. Ahab modestly retorted by quoting a popular proverb. "Tell him," he said, " 'Let not him that is girding on his armor boast him-

self as he who puts it off.'" [1] The messengers found the Syrian king and his captains celebrating their anticipated victory by drinking themselves drunk in their tents. Upon receiving Ahab's message Benhadad gave orders for the siege of the city.

Advised and encouraged by an unnamed prophet, Ahab sent out a sallying party of picked young men from the provinces, two hundred and thirty-two in number. At some distance followed his main force of seven thousand men. Benhadad and his generals were still at their drunken orgy. When the Syrian scouts reported the advance of the party of young Hebrews, the maudlin monarch gave the order, "Whether they have come out with peaceful intentions, take them alive; or whether they have come out for war, take them alive."

In the ensuing battle the Hebrews fell upon the Syrians with such fury that the latter were soon panic-stricken and fleeing in disorder. Benhadad himself managed to escape on horse. The Syrian losses in men and chariots were enormous.

Battle at Aphek.—But the Syrians could not believe that the despised Israelites were better warriors than they. It must all have been a mistake, they reasoned. So they began to search for excuses. Benhadad's counselors invented a plausible theory to account for their defeat. "Their gods are hill-gods," they announced, "therefore they were too strong for us. But let us fight against them in the

[1] Compare our homely proverb, "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched."

plain; then surely we shall be stronger than they."

Convinced by their beguiling arguments, the king began the huge task of assembling and equipping a second army equal in strength to the one he had lost. He took the wise precaution of placing new officers in charge. At the end of a year all was ready for another test of strength and valor.

Aphek was the scene of this second encounter of the war. All we are sure of concerning its location is that it was situated, as the Syrians desired, in a plain. Here they spread themselves over the surrounding country. In comparison with their multitude the Israelites seemed "like two small flocks of goats." For seven long days the two armies faced and watched one another cautiously. Then the fighting began. The Hebrews once more won a notable victory. According to the story, they slew a hundred thousand of Benhadad's footmen. Evidently Jehovah was just as powerful on the plain as he had been among his native hills. Furthermore, when the survivors of the Syrian army sought refuge in Aphek, the wall fell and crushed twenty-seven thousand of them.

The Treaty of Peace.—Benhadad fled with the rest and hid in an inner room. His advisers urged him to cast himself on the mercy of Ahab. There was nothing else he could do. So, at their suggestion, he determined to make his appeal as strong as he possibly could. He sent his messengers, dressed in sackcloth and with ropes about their heads in place of turbans, to Ahab with

the abject plea, "Your servant Benhadad says, 'Let me live, please.' " The Israelite king received them most kindly. "Is he still living?" he asked; then added graciously, "He is my brother. Go bring him."

Upon Benhadad's arrival Ahab further reassured him by inviting him to ride in the royal chariot. Benhadad thereupon proposed terms of peace. "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore," he suggested, "and you may establish streets for yourself in Damascus as my father established in Samaria." The king was farsighted enough to realize that such a commercial alliance with the Syrians would prove a great asset; for Benhadad controlled the caravan route to the east and northeast, and was in a strong position either to help or harm Hebrew trade. It was good business policy to accept Benhadad's offer in a friendly spirit. Ahab accordingly did so and set the Syrian king free. Thus the bazaars of Damascus and the regions beyond were opened up to Hebrew traders.

Possibly Ahab's desire for an understanding with his foe was strengthened by the peril they were both facing. Back in the days of Ahab's father the conquering world-power, Assyria, had established its sway clear to the shores of the Mediterranean. At the very moment Ahab was fighting Benhadad it was common knowledge that the reigning king of Assyria, Shalmaneser III, was preparing for a new war of conquest to the west. Only on condition that the tiny western nations unite was there the

slightest hope of their offering successful resistance to the onward march of his cohorts. With this in view, Ahab seems to have entered into a political alliance with Syria, Hamath, and other powers against the common enemy.

Biblical passages: I Kings 19; 20: 1-34; 21.

CHAPTER XXI

AHAB'S TRAGIC END

The Battles of Karkar and Ramoth

JUDAH
Jehoshaphat, 873-849
Jehoram, 849-842
Ahaziah, 842

Ahab Denounced.—Some of Ahab's subjects blamed him severely for his failure to kill Benhadad when he had the opportunity. Thus to let a heathen enemy free seemed to them an act of disloyalty to Jehovah. The patriotic and religious Sons of the Prophets were especially outspoken in their criticism. Their attitude is shown by the following story:

Ahab was returning from his victory at Aphek, where he had spared Benhadad's life. One of these prophets met him and acted out a parable. The fellow had previously disguised himself by placing a bandage over his face. To the king he appeared to be one of the soldiers wounded in the recent fighting. He pretended to be in serious trouble. "In the midst of the battle," he said, "a man turned aside and brought a man to me and said: 'Guard this man; if by any means he be missing, then your

life shall be forfeit for his life, or else you must pay a talent of silver.' And as I was busy here and there he was gone."

No spirit of kindness tempered Ahab's verdict. "Such shall your penalty be," he pronounced, "you have yourself decided it." At this the man removed the bandage, and Ahab recognized him as one of the prophets. He turned the tables on the king by applying his verdict to the case of Benhadad. He cried, "Thus says Jehovah, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life.'" Naturally Ahab was both troubled and displeased at this harsh prediction. He came to Samaria in anything but a cheerful mood.

Ahab at Karkar.—Within a short time Ahab's defensive and offensive alliance with Benhadad was put to a severe test. In the year 854 B.C. Shalmaneser III advanced with his forces to meet the allied armies of the west at Karkar, a city situated on the Orontes river in northern Syria. The great battle that ensued is described by the Assyrian in one of his boastful inscriptions. From this we learn that Ahab furnished two thousand chariots and fourteen thousand men to the allied forces. Shalmaneser claims a sweeping victory, in the course of which his soldiers slew fourteen thousand of the allied troops. We suspect, however, that he is following the usual Assyrian custom of exaggerating the real achievement. Really, the battle seems to have been indecisive. At any rate Shalmaneser did not follow

up his hollow victory, but beat a strategic retreat home to Assyria. Thus ended the first contest in which Hebrew soldiers had ever faced the Assyrian armies. But the relief from attack was only temporary. Shalmaneser soon came back again; and for two centuries to come Assyria was destined to be a constant menace to the Hebrews.

However, the immediate effect of the Assyrian retreat was to release the foolish little western nations from the overshadowing fear of conquest. Inspired with false confidence, they felt secure enough to resume the petty local bickerings and jealousies that kept them in perpetual turmoil and consequent weakness.

Second Syrian War.—It was her old foe Syria that furnished Israel once more with cause for war. Shiftiness and evasion are reckoned by the average Oriental among his strongest political weapons. In this respect Benhadad was a typical son of the East. It need cause us little surprise, therefore, to learn that he sought to avoid carrying out the terms of the treaty of Aphek, by which he had saved his skin. Among the cities he had then agreed to return to Ahab was the fortified town of Ramoth in Gilead. And yet, three years after, this important eastern outpost of Israel was still held tightly in his possession. Evidently he had no intention of letting it go.

So, after Karkar, Ahab decided that the time was ripe for a settlement. With shrewd foresight he had already formed an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Jehoshaphat was visiting Ahab in

Samaria when the actual decision for war was made. "Will you go with me to battle against Ramoth in Gilead?" Ahab inquired. "I am as you," was Jehoshaphat's reply, "my people as your people, my horses as your horses." This whole-hearted support was just what Ahab wanted.

Jehoshaphat, however, demanded that they follow the usual custom of inquiring from Jehovah as to the outcome of the approaching campaign. Four hundred prophets of Jehovah, all evidently in the royal service, were summoned by the king of Israel. "Shall I go out against Ramoth of Gilead in battle," he asked, "or shall I forbear?" With one voice they answered, "Go up; for Jehovah will deliver it into the hand of the king."

Micaiah's Prediction.—Somewhat suspicious of the unanimity of these fawning hired prophets, the king of Judah inquired, "Is there here no other prophet of Jehovah that we may inquire of him?" "There is one man more," Ahab reluctantly replied, "but I hate him; for he prophesies no good concerning me but only evil—Micaiah, the son of Imlah." As Jehoshaphat still insisted, Ahab at last unwillingly sent a messenger to fetch the dauntless prophet.

The two kings sat on thrones at the gate of Samaria, attired in their gorgeous royal robes, awaiting the arrival of the prophet. Before them the four hundred mercenary prophets were working themselves into a state of ecstasy. Their leader, Zedekiah, made horns of iron as a symbol of success, and brought them to Ahab. "With these," he af-

firmed, "you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed." As for the rest of the court prophets, they kept repeating their predictions of sweeping victory.

Ahab's messenger found Micaiah, and counseled him to fall in line with the rest of the prophets by speaking favorably. "What Jehovah says to me," answered the prophet, "that will I speak." So he entered into the presence of the two monarchs. Ahab spoke. "Micaiah," he inquired, "shall we go to Ramoth in Gilead to battle or shall we forbear?" Contemptuously the prophet repeated the very words of the king's hired prophets. "Go up," he said, "and prosper; for Jehovah will deliver it into the hand of the king." The king saw that the prophet was speaking in irony—that he was having a joke at his expense. "How many times must I adjure you," he burst forth angrily, "that you speak nothing but the truth in the name of Jehovah?"

Then Micaiah revealed his true reading of the future. It was in the form of a vision containing a veiled prediction of Ahab's death. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains," he said, "as sheep that have no shepherd. And Jehovah said, 'These have no master; let them return each one to his home in peace.' "

Again Ahab flared up. "Did I not tell you," he said, turning to Jehoshaphat, "that he would prophesy no good concerning me but only evil?" Micaiah ignored the outburst, and went quietly on to describe another vision. "I saw Jehovah sitting

on his throne," he declared, "and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right and on his left. Then Jehovah said, 'Who shall deceive Ahab so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth in Gilead?' And one suggested one thing and another another. Then there came a certain spirit and stood before Jehovah and said, 'I will deceive him.' And Jehovah said, 'How?' And he answered 'I will go forth and become a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And Jehovah said, 'You shall be successful in deceiving him. Go forth and do so.' Now therefore see," concluded Micaiah, "Jehovah has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these your prophets; and Jehovah has spoken evil concerning you."

The idea that God would send forth a lying spirit to deceive the king seems strange to us. But it caused no difficulty in the times of Micaiah and Ahab. People then looked upon Jehovah as the source of good and evil alike. In order to accomplish his purpose he might deceive people if it seemed best. The spirit he employed in this case was the predecessor of the Satan of later Jewish belief. Like Satan in the book of Job, this lying spirit was a member of the heavenly council of angelic beings and is not really wicked. And yet in his eagerness to lead Ahab to his doom he shows qualities like those later ascribed to the prince of demons. This is the first mention of this being in the Hebrew literature that has come down to us.

Micaiah's prophetic vision brought him that day only ridicule and persecution. Zedekiah, leader

of the four hundred deceived prophets, taunted him and even struck him in the face. Ahab turned Micaiah over to the jailers with the order: "Put this fellow in prison and feed him with scanty prison fare until I return in peace." Micaiah retorted with some heat, "If you do return in peace Jehovah has not spoken by me." What happened to him after he was locked up we do not know.

Ahab's Death.—Ahab's plans had gone too far to permit him to be turned away from his project by the pessimistic predictions of a single despised prophet. He chose rather to follow his own inclinations, especially as these had been approved by four hundred prophets of Jehovah. Micaiah's visions had, however, so worked upon the king's fears that he took the precaution of disguising himself as a common soldier. Jehoshaphat, on the contrary, went forth to the attack on Ramoth clad in all his splendid royal robes. He offered an easy target for the enemy.

The Syrians were under the direct command of Benhadad himself. His main concern was of course to get Ahab, the heart and soul of the whole enterprise. "Fight with neither small nor great," he commanded his officers, "except only with the king of Israel." As a direct result of this order Jehoshaphat came within an ace of losing his life. Seeing from afar the royal garments, the Syrians naturally mistook him for Ahab. They began to surround him with their chariots, their idea being to cut him off from the rest. Only when he hap-

pened to cry out did they realize their mistake and turn elsewhere to seek their real prey.

In spite of his careful disguise, Ahab did not escape the fate predicted for him by the man he had left locked up in prison. A Syrian soldier, never dreaming that his action was going to decide the contest, drew his bow at a venture. Providence directed that the arrow should pierce the joints of Ahab's armor. Mortally wounded, the king ordered his chariot driver to take him out of the thick of the battle. But Ahab refused to leave the field. With astonishing courage and fortitude he continued to direct the fray all through the rest of the day, propped up in his chariot. The blood from his wound soon filled the bottom of the chariot—and still he remained.

Just as the sun was setting, Ahab died. Shrilly the cry rang out through the Hebrew camp: "Every man to his city and every man to his land!" With their brave leader dead, the soldiers had no more heart to fight. So home they went. Ahab was honorably buried in Samaria. A brave man and able king passed away that day. Had he possessed spiritual insight and a social conscience he would rank as a really great character.

Jehoshaphat and His Successors.—During the entire reign of Ahab in Israel, and for some time after his death, Jehoshaphat ruled over the southern kingdom. Like Asa, his father, he was a reforming king. He purified the temple worship of much of the grossness which it had adopted from Baalism. Through his military prowess Edom was once more

brought under the sway of Judah. This gave him possession of the important port of Ezion-Geber on the northeastern arm of the Red Sea. He attempted to resume the gold trade with Ophir, which seems to have been discontinued since the days of Solomon. To attain his object he built ships on the Red Sea. But these were wrecked before they had so much as cleared the port. King Ahaziah of Israel, who had succeeded his father Ahab, proposed that they combine forces and try again. But this for some reason Jehoshaphat was unwilling to do.

His alliance with Ahab had healed for a time the age-long breach between the two kingdoms. But, as we have seen, it almost cost him his life at Ramoth in Gilead. The alliance proved a dire misfortune to Judah in still another way. Jehoshaphat had sealed the compact by marrying his son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Athaliah inherited her mother's ruthless energy and fanatic devotion to the Tyrian Baal. When she became queen in Judah she introduced and fostered there the degenerate worship of that immoral god. Later on, as we shall see, she killed her grandchildren in order that she might seize the throne.

Concerning Jehoshaphat's immediate successors we have little information. In the days of his son Jehoram, the Edomites rebelled once more against the overlordship of Judah. In an attempt to subdue them Jehoram and his chariots were ambushed by the enemy, and he barely succeeded in breaking through and saving his army by flight. Thus Edom regained her independence. Libnah, a fortress on

the Philistine border, also secured its freedom about this time.

At the death of Jehoram, his son Ahaziah became king. After a brief reign of one year he lost his life while visiting his uncle Joram, king of Israel. As will presently appear, the two kings fell victim to the zeal of Jehu, the revolutionist.

Biblical passages: I Kings 20:35-43; 22; II Kings 8: 16-29.

CHAPTER XXII

ELISHA TAKES UP ELIJAH'S UNFINISHED TASK

ISRAEL
Ahaziah, 854-853
Joram, 853-842
Jehu, 842-815

Ahaziah of Israel.—The tragic death of Ahab put his son Ahaziah on the throne of Israel. It was soon seen that the new king was strongly under the influence of his mother Jezebel. He served and worshiped Baal in the way she had taught him. Of course this greatly displeased the prophetic party. They bitterly opposed Ahaziah and longed for his overthrow.

Providence intervened to save them the trouble of getting rid of their Baal-serving ruler. An evil fate semed to pursue the family of Ahab. Ahaziah was as unlucky as the rest. He had reigned about a year or so, when one day he happened to fall through the lattice-work window of his upper apartment in the palace at Samaria. Realizing that he was badly hurt, he determined to seek divine help. But he did not inquire of Jehovah, Israel's god. Instead he disloyally sent messengers to Ekron, to inquire of the Philistine god Baal-Zebub whether he should recover.

This act did not escape the vigilant notice of the prophet Elijah. Impelled by the angel of Jehovah, he went forth to intercept the messengers. "Go back again to the king who sent you," he thundered, "and say to him, 'Is it because there is no god in Israel that you send to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but shall surely die.' " Then the prophet mysteriously departed without telling anyone who he was.

The astonished messengers turned back and reported their strange encounter. "What kind of man was he?" demanded Ahaziah. They replied, "A man clad in a hairy skin and girt with a leather girdle about his loins." "It is Elijah," he cried angrily. Immediately he sent an officer with fifty men to arrest the bold prophet. When they came near, Elijah called down fire from heaven. The flames consumed them all. The king sent another fifty. These were destroyed in like manner. A third company fared more fortunately. Their commander treated Elijah with the respect due a spokesman of Jehovah. Falling on his knees, he prayed for his own life and those of his men. Elijah graciously spared them and accompanied them to the court. Upon his arrival he denounced the king to his face, and again predicted his death. Shortly after Ahaziah died as the prophet had said.

Killing two large companies of soldiers who had been guilty of no crime worse than that of obeying orders, seems to us a great blot upon the character

of Elijah. Moreover, it is hard to believe that God would assist in what was little short of murder. Certainly this incident is not at all in the spirit of the noblest religion of Israel. As a matter of fact, many scholars suppose that this episode is a legend added in later times to the story of Ahaziah's death. The early narrators of this legend were so interested in the miraculous side of the incident that they forgot how unjust it was. One may well doubt whether the prophet who risked his life to protest against Ahab's injustice toward Naboth would himself have been so cruel as to kill a hundred helpless and innocent soldiers.

Elijah's Ascent to Heaven.—At length Elijah realized that he was about to end his earthly career. He determined to pay a last visit to the bands of prophets dwelling near the Jordan valley. Although repeatedly urged by Elijah to remain behind, Elisha accompanied his master on this farewell journey.

Starting from that Gilgal which lies between Shechem and Bethel, they came down to Bethel. The Sons of the Prophets residing at this famous shrine warned Elisha that Jehovah was about to take away his master. Thence the two prophets descended to Jericho. The prophets living there made the same prediction. Elijah announced that he must cross the Jordan. Still Elisha followed him. Far behind them fifty members of the prophetic settlement stood and watched the two lonely travelers. When they reached the river Jordan, Elijah rolled up his mantle and struck the

waters. At once they cleft asunder so that the two prophets crossed dry-shod.

Arrived at the east bank, Elijah turned to his companion and said, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha replied, "I pray, let the elder son's portion of your spirit be upon me." "If you see me when I am taken from you," Elijah cried, "it shall be so to you." So they went on, deep in conversation, toward the high plains of Moab. Somewhere off there Moses lay buried on Mount Nebo. At last the fifty watchers could see the two no more.

Suddenly a marvelous thing happened. There swept between the two men a chariot of fire with horses of fire. Elijah was separated from Elisha and carried away by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha gazed in wonder at the sight and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" By this he meant to say that Elijah was of more importance to the nation's defense and welfare than an army with its chariots and soldiers. Never again was Elijah seen alive.

Picking up the mantle which Elijah had dropped as he disappeared, Elisha returned to the Jordan. He wondered whether the older prophet's spirit had indeed descended upon him. He learned that it had. For when he struck the river with the wonder-working mantle, it miraculously divided for him also. The fifty prophets, who had waited patiently all this while, saw the miracle. Bowing down before Elisha, they acknowledged him as their new leader. The prophets at Jericho still entertained

some lingering fears, however, that Elijah might have been dropped by the spirit of Jehovah on some mountain or in a valley. So they secured permission from Elisha to look for him. Three days' vain search over hill and dale satisfied them that he had indeed been translated to heaven. From this time on to his death, Elisha remained undisputed head of Israel's Sons of the Prophets.

Life and Work of Elijah.—Absolute loyalty to Jehovah had been the central life motive of Elijah. His passionate devotion manifested itself in two ways: (1) he could not endure for a moment the existence beside Jehovah of the rival Baals; (2) he insisted that loyalty to Jehovah demanded as a matter of course the practice of social justice. In carrying out this double religious and social program he found it necessary at times to use violent means. The lightning he was reputed to have called down from the heavens was a symbol of his whole career and nature. His task, as he found it, was rather to tear down and destroy than to build up.

In his devotion to the simple ideals of the desert life he had to fight not only Baalism itself, but the whole fabric of civilization that clung to it. So intense was his ardor for Jehovah that he despised comforts and even shunned human kind. He dwelt as a lonely ascetic in desert regions. The impression he gives one is that of a figure uncannily heroic in its proportions, with a somewhat austere and forbidding personality. The sheer greatness of the man rather than any winsome charm in him com-

manded the obedience and loyalty of his disciples, the Sons of the Prophets.

But with all this he doubtless possessed real gentleness of spirit. His mystic experience at Horeb of the tenderer side of Jehovah must have opened up within him generous founts of kindliness. Certainly his disciple Elisha seems to have entertained sentiments of deep and genuine affection for the rugged prophet.

No one can question the important rôle of Elijah in carrying forward the cause of Israel's religion. Like Moses, he towers as a massive mountain peak above all the drifting mists of legend and story that have gathered about his name. Standing four-square against degraded Baalism and royal tyranny, he was the one upon whose achievements the great social prophets of the eighth century freely built. Of all the spokesmen for Jehovah he was the most original, and the one who made the deepest impression upon the imaginations of later ages. In times of exile and distressful persecution the Hebrew people longed for an Elijah to return as the forerunner of the great and terrible day of national deliverance and restoration. This expectation voices itself in the very closing words of our Old Testament (Mal. 4:4-6). Jesus saw in fearless, fiery John the Baptist a genuine realization of this ancient hope.

Character of Elisha.—Elijah's disciple and successor, Elisha, was a very different type of man. He was neither so fierce nor so impulsive. He seems gentler and kindlier. To be sure, some of

the stories told about him indicate that he could be uncompromising enough when occasion demanded. But in general he impresses us as far more tolerant of human shortcomings, always eager to help and reluctant to denounce people. Instead of dwelling solitary, apart from human kind, he was companionable and loved to be where his fellowmen lived and toiled.

In his early life on a farm he showed a spirit of coöperation and helpfulness. When he was elevated to the prophetic office he was the respected friend and adviser of kings, rather than their unrelenting and bitter enemy. While he learned much from his greater master and teacher, he was more successful than Elijah in molding public opinion, simply because he knew better how to employ tact and conciliation. His was the tremendously important task of making effective in the political and social life of Israel the fundamental principles so valiantly championed by his predecessor. Thus the two great prophets complemented one another in marvelous fashion. It was needful that the old order, as represented by the stern reformer Elijah, should make way for the more constructive method and message of the genial Elisha.

Joram of Israel.—Joram (sometimes spelled Jehoram[1]) succeeded to the throne of Israel upon the death of his ill-fated brother Ahaziah. The most

[1] To be kept distinct from Jehoram of Judah. The same caution should be observed with regard to Ahaziah and Joash (or Jehoash).

important event of his reign was an unsuccessful attempt to recover Moab, which had again revolted.

Moab had originally been brought into subjection to the Hebrews as the result of a rigorous campaign by King David. Under a later king it regained its freedom. Omri conquered it once more, and exacted a yearly tribute of a hundred thousand lambs, and wool from another hundred thousand rams. After Omri's death the Moabites again broke the Israelitish yoke. The details are supplied by the Moabite Stone, already mentioned, one of the most important monuments yet found in the Holy Land.

The Moabite Stone was discovered in the year 1868 by a missionary from Jerusalem. It lay among the ruins of Dibon in Moab, four miles north of the majestic gorge of the Arnon River. Its thirty-four lines contain the account by the Moabite king Mesha of how their god Chemosh had enabled him to regain the national freedom.

After stating that Omri and his son had afflicted Moab many days, Mesha continues: "The men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Ataroth from of old; and the king of Israel had built Ataroth for himself. And I fought against the city and took it. And I slew all the people from the city, a pleasing spectacle for Chemosh and for Moab. . . . And Chemosh said to me, 'Go, take Nebo against Israel.' And I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon. And I took it and put them all to death, seven thousand men and boys and women and girls and female slaves; for I had devoted it to

Ashtar-Chemosh. And I took thence the altar-hearths of Jehovah and I dragged them before Chemosh. And the king of Israel had fortified Jahaz and dwelt in it while he fought against me. And Chemosh drove him out before me. I took of Moab two hundred men, of all its clans, and led them up against Jahaz and took it to add to Dibon." From this point on, Mesha tells of rebuilding the important cities, and preparing the country to resist any further attack by the Israelites. Part of the work was done by Israelite prisoners.

The only mention in Hebrew sources of these notable successes of Mesha is the statement that the king of Moab rebelled. Then follows the record of the remarkable campaign in which King Joram tried to regain Moab. Before starting out he summoned Jehoshaphat of Judah to aid him, as his father Ahab had done under similar circumstances. Jehoshaphat readily agreed to help. The two kings decided to avoid the strong cities in the north of Moab, recently fortified by King Mesha, and determined to attack Moab from the south. In order to do this they were obliged to take the long, hot route around the south end of the Dead Sea. Nothing daunted, they started out. Arriving safely in Edom, they summoned to their aid the forces of the Edomite king, who was at that time the vassal of Jehoshaphat.

At the end of a difficult seven days' march through the barren steppes of Edom, they reached the frontier of Moab. Men and beasts alike were almost dead from thirst. Joram seemed to lose

courage entirely. "Alas!" he wailed, "for Jehovah has called these three kings together to deliver them into the power of Moab." But the king of Judah was not minded to give up so easily. "Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah," he inquired, "that we many inquire of Jehovah through him?" One of Joram's servants replied: "Elisha, who poured water upon the hands of Elijah, is here."

So the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom all went down to consult Elisha. At first the prophet refused to give an oracle. However, out of consideration for the king of Judah, he at length relented and commanded, "Bring me a minstrel." It seems that Elisha, like the Sons of the Prophets, was in the habit of using music to bring on the prophetic state. Nor was there any prejudice against oracles because they were thus induced.

The minstrel came and played. The power of Jehovah took hold of the prophet. "Make this torrent-valley full of trenches," was his command. "You shall not see wind, neither shall you see rain; yet that torrent valley shall be filled with water, so that you and your beasts shall drink. And this is but a slight thing in the sight of Jehovah; he will also deliver the Moabites into your power."

It happens that the ground formation in this region is somewhat peculiar. Water from the hills quickly sinks below the surface, and is retained by the rocky bottom a short distance underground. For some time after a rain one may obtain water by digging through the top sand and gravel. So the wisdom of Elisha's advice was soon shown. In the

evening the trenches were dug. By morning they were filled with water.

The beams of the rising sun were reflected in the water until the pools gleamed red. When the Moabites guarding the frontier saw this, they leaped to the conclusion that the red color was that of blood, Thinking that the allies had fallen out and slain one another, they rushed forward pell-mell with the exultant cry, "Now to the spoil, Moab!" But a disagreeable surprise was in store for them. The Israelites met them in full force and routed them. They were utterly unable to stem the tide of assault.

Onward into the land the Hebrews and Edomites pressed, burning cities, devastating fields, stopping up springs and destroying trees. King Mesha with his depleted army was forced to take refuge in the capital city. Hemmed in there by the enemy, he gathered seven hundred men about him for a desperate attempt to break through. His intention was to join forces with the king of Edom, who seems to have been a rather unwilling partner in the Hebrew alliance. This brave sortie failed, however, and Mesha was again forced to seek safety behind the walls.

Then he made his supreme effort. If human strength was of no avail, divine aid must be summoned. Mesha shared the ancient belief that the aid of the gods could be compelled if a great enough sacrifice were offered. Now, the most efficacious sacrifice of all was a human being, especially if that human being were an elder son. So in despair the

king took the crown prince and offered him on the city wall in full view of friend and foe alike as a burnt-offering to Chemosh, the national divinity. This frightful performance had the desired result. We read that "there came great wrath upon Israel, so that they departed from him and returned to their own land." Whether the effect of this rite of human sacrifice was to inspire the Moabites with such courage that they defeated the invaders in open conflict on the field of battle; or whether the superstitious fears of the Hebrews drove them home without further fighting, we are not told.

This vivid story aptly illustrates two things: (1) the barbarous methods of ancient warfare; (2) the somewhat primitive religious beliefs and practices of Elisha and his contemporaries. In the stage of civilization reached by Israel at that period it was perfectly natural that these things should be so. Many years were to elapse before God could more fully reveal himself.

Biblical passages: II Kings 1; 2:1-18; 3.

CHAPTER XXIII

ELISHA THE WONDER-WORKER

Many romantic tales cluster about the wonder-working prophet Elisha. Usually he is represented as going about from place to place in friendly fashion, working helpful miracles like those of the saints of the Middle Ages. At other times he appears in harsher moods.

Lads at Bethel.—Perhaps the most astounding of the stories told about Elisha is that which recounts his cruel treatment of some rude lads at Bethel. While on a visit there, he happened to be walking one day along the road just outside the walls. An unmannerly crowd of young fellows came out through the city gate. Noticing that the prophet was bald, they shouted, "Go up, you bald-head!" One must remember that in those days baldness was far less common than today, and was considered rather a disgrace.

The insulting remark of the lads so angered Elisha that he turned around and cursed them. At once two she-bears rushed out of the neighboring wood and tore in pieces forty-two of the young boys.

Healing of the Fountain.—Visitors to the ruins of ancient Jericho still notice a spring of excellent water rising from the mound. This spring, called

the Fountain of Elisha, is connected with another marvelous incident in the Elisha cycle of stories. It seems that the waters were originally very hurtful. The people of the city appealed to the prophet in the confident hope that he would work a miracle. "Bring me a new jar," he commanded, "and put salt in it." This was done. Elisha went to the spring and emptied the salt into it. The desired miracle was wrought. The waters became wholesome, and have remained so to this day.

The Widow's Oil.—On another occasion the widow of one of the Sons of the Prophets came to Elisha in great distress. A creditor was about to take her two sons as slaves in payment of a debt. According to the law he had a perfect right to do so. "What have you in the house?" inquired Elisha. "Your servant has nothing in the house except a pot of oil," replied the poor woman. He said, "Go borrow empty vessels from all your neighbors. Then go in, shut the door upon yourself and your sons, and pour oil into all the vessels."

So the woman went to all her neighbors and borrowed jars until there were no more. When she began to pour out the olive oil from her tiny pot a remarkable thing happened. The oil kept increasing; and she poured until all the jars and pans and kettles overflowed. "Bring me another vessel," she called to one of her sons. "There is no other," he replied. Then there was no further flow of oil. Gratefully she came to Elisha and told him what had occurred. "Go, sell the oil," he commanded,

"and pay your debt; and with what is left you and your sons can live."

The Poisoned Pottage.—The Sons of the Prophets used to live together in communities, much like monks in our own time. As their leader, Elisha used to visit these settlements from time to time, making Gilgal his headquarters. Once during a time of famine he came back to the community at Gilgal. At his suggestion the servant set the pot over the fire to boil pottage for the whole company of prophets. One of the men went out into the fields and gathered a lap full of gourds from a wild vine he found. Thinking they were good to eat, he cut them up and put them into the pot. But no sooner had the Sons of the Prophets begun to eat the pottage than they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot." Whereupon Elisha poured some meal into the pot, and the food became wholesome.

A Miraculous Feeding.—One day during the same famine a man brought to Gilgal a present consisting of twenty barley loaves and some garden produce in a sack. Elisha instructed his servant to give it to the prophets for their meal. "What," he exclaimed, "should I set this before a hundred men?" "They shall eat and leave some over," the prophet replied. It was as he said. The hundred prophets fully satisfied their craving hunger and actually left some food over.

The Floating Ax-Head.—In the course of time the number of prophets at Gilgal increased to such a degree that they became greatly cramped for

room. One suggested that they all go to the wooded Jordan valley, and build a new and larger home there. Elisha accompanied them. The prophets set to work felling trees for the beams of the new house. One unlucky fellow lost the head of his ax in the water. "Alas, my master," he cried, "for it was borrowed!" "Where did it fall?" asked Elisha. The man pointed to the spot. Elisha cut a stick and threw it into the water. At once the iron ax-head floated to the surface. The man put out his hand and took it.

The Shunammite's Son.—Elisha, as well as Elijah, was credited with restoring to life the son of a woman who had been kind to him. This woman was a wealthy resident of Shunem, a village located on a hill looking southwest over the plain of Esdraelon. On his journeys from Gilgal to Mount Carmel, Elisha was accustomed to pass through the town. On these occasions he was entertained in the woman's home. After a time she persuaded her husband to build a permanent guest chamber on the roof of the house, so that the prophet might use it whenever he happened to go through. She provided the room with the usual furniture, a bed, table, stool and lamp-stand.

On his next visit Elisha sent for the woman in order to express his appreciation. He offered to commend her to the king or to the commander of the army. Either of these might prove useful friends in time of need. But she refused all rewards, pointing out that she already had the support of her powerful clan and, therefore, did not require

royal or official favors. After she had gone Elisha's servant, Gehazi, dropped a hint. "She has no son," he remarked, "and her husband is old." This idea appealed to Elisha. He called back the Shunammite woman and promised what seemed to her too good to be true—that she should have a son. In due time the son was born.

One day some years later the lad, now almost grown, went out to the field. There he visited with his father, who was superintending the reapers. The sun was too hot for the lad. Suddenly he collapsed, crying out, "My head, my head!" They lifted him up gently and brought him to his mother. On her lap he sat until noon; then he died. She sadly carried him to the upper room and placed him on Elisha's bed.

In her sorrow the afflicted mother hastened to Carmel to seek the aid of the prophet. Elisha first sent Gehazi ahead with instructions to lay his master's staff upon the face of the child. But he returned with the report that this brought no sign of life to the body. When Elisha arrived he entered the room where the boy lay, closed the door, and prayed. Then he placed himself upon the child, mouth upon mouth, eyes upon eyes, and hands upon hands. Soon the body began to grow warmer. After a while the child sneezed seven times. Then he opened his eyes. Elisha sent for the Shunammite and said, "Take up your son." In reverent wonder she knelt before this kindly worker of miracles. Then she joyously took her son and departed.

The Shunammite's Property Restored.—But trouble again visited the Shunammite woman. A seven years' famine was about to come upon Israel. Elisha foresaw the calamity, and advised the woman to take her household out of the land. She followed his advice by emigrating to Philistia.

As soon as the famine was over she returned to Israel. To her dismay she discovered that strangers had illegally seized her house and lands during her absence. Accompanied by her son she hastened to court, there to petition the king for the return of her property.

When she arrived, it happened that the king was listening to Gehazi's account of the wonderful deed of Elisha in restoring her son to life. Gehazi recognized her as soon as she entered and exclaimed, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life."

The king graciously asked what she wanted. After hearing her case he appointed an official to look after her interests. "Restore all that was hers," he decreed, "and all the produce of her fields since the day she left the land until now."

Healing of Naaman the Syrian.—Far beyond the borders of Israel spread the fame of the wonders wrought by Elisha. In the course of time the Syrians came to know about the marvelous prophet. Several interesting stories are told about Elisha's dealings with these habitual foes of the Hebrews.

One tale deals with a famous Syrian general, Naaman. This man had won such notable successes in battle that he had been appointed commander in

chief of the army. He had had the misfortune, however, to contract the dreadful and loathsome disease of leprosy.

Now it happened that a marauding expedition into Israel's borders returned with a little Hebrew maiden among the captives. She was assigned to wait upon Naaman's wife. One day she remarked to her mistress, "Would that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria. Then he would recover him of his leprosy." Her words were repeated to Naaman. So impressed was he that he determined to go to Samaria. Soon he was on his way, bearing rich presents from the king of Syria to Israel's king. With him he carried a royal missive which read, "Now when this letter reaches you, behold I have sent Naaman my servant to you that you may recover him of his leprosy."

When the king of Israel read this letter he could not understand it. He supposed that the Syrian king was making an impossible demand on him as a pretext for war. But Elisha came to his rescue. "Let Naaman come to me," he sent word to the king.

So the general, accompanied by all his stately retinue, appeared before Elisha's door. The prophet did not so much as come out to greet him. Instead he sent a messenger with the injunction, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall again become clean."

This unceremonious treatment infuriated Naaman. He had expected more attention. He proudly refused to bathe in the muddy waters of the

Jordan. But his servants urged him to reconsider. "If the prophet had bid you do some hard thing," they argued, "would you not have done it? How much rather then, when he says to you 'Wash and be clean.'" Finally Naaman reluctantly obeyed and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan. Then an amazing thing came to pass. His flesh became clean like that of a little child.

Returning to Elisha, this great Syrian general confessed, "Behold now, I know there is no God in all the earth except in Israel." He insisted that Elisha should accept a present; but the prophet refused. Then Naaman loaded two mules with earth to take with him. This he did in order that he might be able to worship Jehovah on Hebrew soil even in Damascus. But he remembered that official duties might require him occasionally to go through the motions of rendering homage to the Syrian god, Rimmon. "May Jehovah pardon your servant in this thing," he besought Elisha. "Go in peace," was the prophet's gracious reply. Thus, healed and converted, Naaman started with his horses and chariots on the homeward journey.

Gehazi's greedy eyes had glistened at the sight of the rich presents his master had spurned. He had no scruples about accepting pay for divine healing. "I will run after him and take something from him," he decided. Off he hurried. Naaman saw him in the distance and alighted from his chariot. Gehazi lied breathlessly, "My master has sent me saying, 'Just now two young men of the Sons of the Prophets have come to me from the hill country of

Ephraim. Give them, I pray, a talent of silver and two changes of raiment.'" Naaman was deceived by the tale. "Take *two* talents," he insisted. Gehazi did so without overmuch urging. Upon the shoulders of each of two servants Naaman placed a bag containing a talent of silver, weighing almost 100 pounds. When the servants arrived at Gehazi's house, he took the bags and hid them away. Then he went in to Elisha.

"Where have you been?" asked the prophet. "Nowhere," answered Gehazi glibly. But Elisha knew the inmost secrets of his being. "Went not my spirit with you," he said sternly, "when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever." Immediately the dread disease fastened itself upon Gehazi and he went out from Elisha's presence a leper, his diseased flesh as white as snow.

A Syrian Army Trapped.—An unnamed king of Syria was carrying on guerrilla warfare against Israel. On several occasions he planned ambushes. But in each case Elisha had a supernatural revelation and warned the king of Israel to avoid the place. This happened so often that the Syrian king began to suspect treachery in his own ranks. Calling his servants, he said, "Will you not show me who has betrayed us to the king of Israel?" One of the men replied, "Elisha the prophet tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber." "Where is he?" asked the king. "In Dothan," came the answer.

To Dothan, then, the Syrian king sent horses and chariots and a great army by night. By morning the besiegers were to be seen completely surrounding the city. "Alas, my master!" cried Elisha's servant, "What shall we do?' "Fear not," he answered, "for they that are with us are more than they that are with them." Then the prophet prayed, "Jehovah, open his eyes, I pray, that he may see." And the young man saw that the mountain was filled with horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

When these divine helpers had come down to him, Elisha prayed, "Smite this people with blindness, I pray." The petition was granted and the enemy host became blind. Then Elisha played a practical joke upon the blinded army. "This is not the way," he announced, "nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man you seek." The Syrian army stumbled after him to Samaria.

Arrived within the walls of the city, Elisha opened the eyes of the astonished Syrians. They were in a trap, completely surrounded by Israelite troops. "My father," cried the king of Israel to Elisha, "shall I smite them?" "No," he replied, "set bread and water before them that they may eat and drink and go to their master." This experience of Elisha's power and kindness made such a deep impression upon the Syrians that they left Israel unmolested for some time.

Samaria Delivered from Siege.—On another occasion Benhadad of Syria brought up all his army and laid siege to Samaria. The land happened to be

suffering from famine at the time. Between famine and siege the plight of the citizens became most distressing. Large sums of money were paid for such disgusting articles of diet as asses' heads and doves' dung.

One day during the siege as the king was making the rounds of the city wall, a woman came to him with a plea for his intervention. "This woman," she complained, pointing to her companion, "said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we boiled my son and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him.' But she has hidden her son."

Of course this revolting tale horrified the king. He tore his clothes in token of despair and grief. For some unexplained reason he blamed Elisha for the state of affairs. "May God do so to me and more also," he swore, "if the head of Elisha remains this day on his shoulders." He angrily made his way to Elisha's house, determined to act. But the prophet made an astonishing prediction. "Tomorrow about this time," he declared, "shall a peck of fine meal be sold for a shekel, and two pecks of barley for a shekel in Samaria's gate."

The captain who attended the king was skeptical. "Though Jehovah should make windows in heaven," he mocked, "how could this thing be?" Elisha replied, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but shall not eat of it."

That same evening four wretched lepers at the gate of Samaria made a great discovery. They had

made up their minds that, rather than die of starvation, they would risk surrendering to the enemy. Stealing through the twilight they approached the Syrian camp. To their amazement they found it entirely deserted. It seems that Jehovah had caused the Syrians to hear a mysterious noise in the air, like the advance of a great army. They had leaped to the conclusion that the Israelites had called in Hittite and Egyptian reinforcements to their aid. In wild disorder they had fled, leaving tents and goods behind them.

The lepers, after gorging themselves and hiding away great quantities of gold and silver and fine clothing, bethought themselves of the people in Samaria. Back through the night they hastened to communicate the good news. The keeper of the city gate at once awakened the king. He, suspecting a trick, sent two chariots after the Syrian army to investigate. His messengers returned reporting that the way to the Jordan was strewn with vessels and garments cast aside by the enemy in their wild stampede.

Out through the city gate crowded the people, eager to plunder the Syrian camp. In the crush, the courtier who had jeered at Elisha's prediction, and who was acting now as gate-keeper, was trampled to death. Barley and flour were again sold in Samaria's gate in abundance. Thus was Elisha once more vindicated as a true prophet of Jehovah.

Biblical passages: II Kings 2:19-25; 4:1 to 8:6.

CHAPTER XXIV

ELISHA THE REVOLUTIONIST

Two of the commands given to Elijah at Horeb had never been carried out. Hazael had not yet been anointed king over Syria, nor Jehu over Israel. Elisha conceived it to be his duty, as Elijah's successor, to execute both of these divine commissions, be the cost what it might. Thus it happened that this prophet, ordinarily so kindly and beneficent in his actions, decided to enter the bloody arena of revolutionary politics and intrigue.

Elisha Instigates Hazael.—Before cleaning house at home, Elisha determined to fulfil his appointed task in Syria. While he was on a visit to Damascus the opportunity came. The king, Benhadad II, lay sick in the palace. Someone told him of Elisha's presence in the city. He sent his general, Hazael, to the prophet with forty camels' loads of valuable presents. Hazael was instructed to put the question for his royal master: "Shall I recover from this sickness?" The prophet returned a very curious reply. He said, "Go say to him, 'You shall recover' "; then he added, "but Jehovah has showed me that he will surely die." Thereupon Elisha burst into tears. "Why do you weep?" inquired Hazael. "Because I know the evil that you will do to the

people of Israel," he answered; "Jehovah has showed me that you will be king over Syria."

Hazael took the hint Elisha had thrown out. He brought back to Benhadad the report, "Elisha told me that you would surely recover." At the same time he watched for a chance to murder his master. On the very next day he found his opportunity. He took the coverlet of the king's bed, dipped it in water, and spread it over Benhadad's face so as to smother him. Thereupon he usurped the throne. And a sorry day it was for Israel and Judah when this murder cleared Hazael's path to the throne. In the years that followed he amply vindicated Elisha's forebodings by showing himself the implacable enemy of the Hebrew people.

Anointing of Jehu.—Next on the prophetic program was the overthrow of Ahab's house. This affair was not the matter of a moment. During weary years Elisha planned and plotted, always waiting for the psychological moment when he might act on the commission bequeathed him by Elijah. Jehu, whom he chose as his chief agent in the revolution, was a dashing and popular young army officer. This forceful man combined eagerness for his own advancement with a certain amount of sympathy with the aims of the prophetic party.

The renewal of hostilities with Syria over Ramoth in Gilead providentially gave Elisha the desired opportunity. The Israelites were besieging the place and had evidently had some measure of success. But in the fighting about the town, King Joram was so severely wounded that he was obliged

to retire to the palace at Jezreel for rest and healing. There he was under the care of his mother Jezebel. His nephew Ahaziah, recently crowned king of Judah, came to visit him and pay his respects. At Ramoth, meanwhile, Jehu had been placed in command in order to complete the capture of the town.

According to Elisha's way of thinking the time for action had at length arrived. Calling to him one of the Sons of the Prophets, he gave command: "Go to Ramoth, look there for Jehu, bring him into an inner room, pour this flask of oil on his head, and say, 'Thus says Jehovah, "I have anointed you king over Israel." ' Then open the door and flee; do not linger."

Off to Ramoth hastened the young prophet. His countenance aflame with the fanatic excitement that marked the members of his order, he burst unceremoniously into the room where Jehu was in conference with his officers. "I have an errand to you, O general," he cried. "To which of us all?" inquired Jehu coolly. "To you, O general," was the reply. Jehu took the fellow into the house. The young man at once anointed him king over Israel. This done, he rushed off as mysteriously as he had appeared.

When Jehu came out, he had a barrage of questions to face. "Is all well?" his comrades demanded. "Why did this insane fellow come to you?" Jehu tried to evade their queries. "You know the man," he said, "and his wild talk." But the officers would not be turned aside. "Tell us,"

they insisted. So Jehu told them what the prophet had said, and how he had anointed him king. The men received the news with boisterous delight. They took off their outer garments to make a rude throne for him on the stairs, the trumpets were blown, and the soldiers shouted, "Jehu is king!"

Jehu's Furious Ride.—Jehu realized that he must strike quickly and unexpectedly if complete success were to be his. Leaving orders that no one be allowed to go out from Ramoth to warn King Joram, he rode at reckless speed toward Jezreel in his chariot. It was not long ere the watchman on the high tower of Jezreel saw the dust swirling above a company dashing up the Vale of Jezreel from the direction of the Jordan. "I see a company," he called out to the king. "Take a horseman," commanded Joram, "and send to meet them and inquire, 'Is all well?'" The messenger was sent. But when he reached the company Jehu ordered him to fall in behind. When the watchman reported that the messenger failed to come back, the puzzled king dispatched a second horseman. Again the watchman reported that the messenger did not return. "The driving is like the driving of Jehu," he added, "for he is wont to drive like a madman."

Alarmed by these mysterious events, the king determined to investigate for himself. He ordered his chariot and rode forth to meet Jehu. King Ahaziah went with him in another chariot. The two kings met the rebellious general and his band

near the field of murdered Naboth. "Is all well, Jehu?" asked Joram anxiously. "How can all be well," he boldly retorted, "as long as the witchcrafts of your mother Jezebel are so many?" Joram saw then that he was in danger. But it was too late. As he turned to flee he cried, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" Jehu quickly drew his bow and shot the king through the heart. Turning to his aide he commanded, "Take him up and throw him in the field of Naboth." In this rude fashion was Elijah's prophecy against Ahab fulfilled.

Ahaziah, meanwhile, tried to make good his escape. Discovering this, Jehu shouted, "Him too! Smite him in the chariot!" The pursuit was on. As the royal chariot was mounting a steep slope near Ibleam, the unlucky king of Judah was overtaken and mortally wounded. His failing strength lasted, however, until he reached Megiddo. There he died. The body was brought by his devoted servants to Jerusalem for royal burial.

Jezebel's Bloody Fate.—Still seeking victims for his religious zeal, Jehu pressed on into Jezreel. Jezebel was naturally the next on his list. She knew that the citizens hated her and that she could not hope for aid from them. So she resolved to meet her approaching death as became one who was the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, and the mother of kings. Painting her eyelids with black antimony in the fashion of beautifying of that land, and dressing in her royal robes as if for a gala occasion, she made ready to meet the slayer of her son.

When Jehu reached the palace gate he saw her standing at an upper window. She heaped bitter scorn upon him, and taunted him with the memory of that other general who had murdered his king. "Is all well, you Zimri, you assassin?" she flung at him. Jehu's only reply was to call to the eunuchs who attended her, "Throw her down!" Seeing how things were going, these faithless rascals obeyed the command and pitched her out of the window. As her body struck the stones it was horribly mangled under the hoofs of the rearing horses, and the blood spattered upon the walls. Jehu trod the corpse under foot as he went into the palace to feast.

At the end of the banquet he remembered the body lying in the courtyard. "See now to this cursed woman," he ordered, "and bury her; for she is a king's daughter." When the men came to take up the body, they found that the wolfish street dogs had been devouring it. Nothing remained of the haughty queen but the skull and hands and feet. This terrible fate was regarded by Jehu and the nation as Jehovah's judgment upon Jezebel's evil deeds.

So perished the imperious queen. She had brought calamity upon her family, upon the nation and, ultimately, upon herself. And yet it must be said in her defense that most of her wickedness was the result of a sincere religious belief. She felt it her duty to further in every possible way the interests of the Baal worship in which she had been brought up. Nor can we refuse our reluctant ad-

miration for the queenly courage with which she faced the inevitable end.

Slaughter of the Princes.—It was not to be expected that Jehu would stop with the slaughter of two or three individuals. No Eastern usurper can rest in security until he has wiped the slate clean of everyone who, by even the remotest chance, might oppose his claims. As long as a single descendant of Ahab remained above ground, Jehu felt uneasy.

In Samaria seventy princes of the royal house made their home. After killing Jezebel, Jehu sent to the guardians of these sons of Joram a challenge to battle. "Pick out the best and most capable of your master's sons," he wrote, "and set him upon his father's throne, and fight for your master's house." But these men realized that they could not hope for success in a contest with Jehu, supported as he was by the entire army. So they decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and wrote a most abject letter of submission.

This opened the way for Jehu to come to the point toward which he had been aiming. "If you are on my side," he wrote, "take the heads of your master's sons and come to me at Jezreel tomorrow at this time." So the heads of the unhappy princes were placed in baskets and delivered at the appointed hour at the gate of Jezreel. "Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning," commanded Jehu.

Early the next morning the people gathered at the gate to listen to a harangue by Jehu. Perhaps he felt he had gone a little too far in the matter of

Ahab's descendants. At any rate he pretended innocence of this last wholesale slaughter. "You are upright," he argued. "I did, indeed, conspire against my master and slew him; but," pointing to the heads, "who smote all these?" He went on to remind them that he had acted under instructions from the prophets. "Jehovah has done that which he spoke by his servant Elijah," he maintained. Having thus quieted all opposition, he further proceeded to kill all that remained in Jezreel of the family and adherents of Ahab.

Fortune seemed still to be playing into Jehu's hands. As he was on his way from Jezreel to Samaria, he met a party of travelers. "Who are you?" he inquired. "We are the kinsmen of Ahaziah," was the reply, "and we came down to visit the children of the king and queen." "Take them alive," he commanded. The soldiers captured them—forty-two in number—then brought them to the pit of Beth-Eked. There they slaughtered them all. This mad act of Jehu put an end forever to the friendship between Israel and Judah, which Ahab had done so much to establish.

Jehonadab the Rechabite.—Jehu had driven but a short distance from the pit of Beth-Eked when he encountered Jehonadab the Rechabite coming to meet him. The Rechabite clan hated Baalism above all things, and even went so far as to avoid having anything to do with the civilization of Canaan, with which this abominable religion was connected. Consequently they refused to drink wine, to practise farming, or to live in permanent

homes. Their ideal was a return to the simple living and stern morals of the desert life.

Jehonadab proved to be a man after Jehu's own heart. "Is your heart honestly with my heart as my heart is with yours?" was the question with which Jehu met him. "It is," he replied promptly. Thereupon Jehu took him up into his chariot. "Come with me," he invited, "and look upon my zeal for Jehovah." Thus the two zealots for Jehovah drove together into Samaria. Jehu's first act there was to repeat the carnival of blood he had staged in Jezreel. He killed off all that remained of the Ahab party in Samaria.

Massacre of the Baal Worshipers.—Jehu's master stroke was yet to come. He resolved to uproot once and for all the worship of Baal, which neither Elijah's force nor Elisha's diplomacy had availed to destroy. To secure this end he resorted to stratagem. He pretended to have come over to the side of Baal. "Ahab served Baal a little," he proclaimed, "Jehu will serve him much." Thereupon he summoned all the priests and worshipers of Baal to a splendid sacrifice.

From all Israel they came thronging to Samaria. The temple of Baal was crowded to the doors. Out of the store-houses the priests brought forth the sacred festal garments in which to array the worshipers.

Meanwhile Jehu was stationing outside the temple eighty armed men, and instructing them to kill every worshiper of Baal at a given signal. He entered the sanctuary, accompanied by Jehonadab.

"Search," he cannily commanded the throng, "and look that there be here with you none of the worshipers of Jehovah, but only worshipers of Baal." Careful search having revealed none loyal to Jehovah, Jehu started to offer sacrifice to Baal. Suddenly he shouted to the guards outside the door, "Go in and slay them; let none come forth!"

In rushed the soldiers with drawn swords. They fell upon the helpless crowd; not a person escaped. The bodies were thrown out, and the images sacred to Baal were burned or broken. The temple was razed to the ground, and the spot desecrated so that it might never again be used for religious purposes. Thus through a series of bloody acts did Jehu put an end to all Baal worship in Israel; at the same time he exterminated the royal house of Ahab which had fostered the foreign religion.

Disastrous Results of Jehu's Policy.—Extremists of his own and later days applauded Jehu for thus killing both the royal family and the Baal worshipers. This party of 'no compromise' argued that all who connected themselves with Baal were disloyal to Jehovah and, therefore, traitors to the state; and traitors have always been judged worthy of death. The compiler of the books of Kings shared this attitude. For him the fact that four descendants of Jehu were permitted by Jehovah to succeed him on the throne was ample proof of divine approval.

Not all, however, agreed with this verdict. Later the enlightened prophet Hosea unhesitatingly condemns these massacres. Because of them he pro-

nounces sure doom upon the house of Jehu. Certain it is that the result of these wholesale murders was to plunge the nation into trouble for a half century to come. The loss of its natural leaders left Israel distraught and almost defenseless in the presence of grave dangers. As in the case of the Holy Inquisition of the Middle Ages and Bolshevism in Russia in our own time, irresponsible and destructive fanaticism, however earnest and sincere, was to prove its own worst enemy.

Biblical passages: II Kings 8:7-15; 9; 10:1-31.

CHAPTER XXV

CONSEQUENCES OF JEHU'S REVOLUTION

Israel		Judah	
Jehoahaz,	815-798	Athaliah,	842-836
Jehoash,	798-783	Joash,	836-797
Jeroboam II,	783-743	Amaziah,	797-779
		Azariah (Uzziah),	779-740

Jehu's Tribute to Assyria.—Jehu was soon reaping the harvest of his misguided zeal. In 842 B.C., the very year of the revolution, the forces of Shalmaneser III again appeared in the West-land. Jehu could offer no effective resistance. He had murdered most of the trained Israelite leaders, and the land was in utmost confusion. The neighboring kingdom of Judah naturally had no love for him nor desire to help him. The result of all this was that when Hazael of Syria prepared to fight Shalmaneser, Jehu dared not join. Instead he imitated the rulers of most of the other small states in that he paid tribute to Assyria to avoid disaster.

If we had to depend on the brief Biblical records for our information about this payment, we should know nothing about it. But it happens that we are fortunate enough to possess two inscriptions of Shalmaneser which mention the matter. One of

them reads in part: "At that time I received the tribute of the Tyrians, the Sidonians, and Jehu, son of Omri." The other inscription is found on the famous black obelisk now in the British Museum. Here Jehu is depicted kneeling before the conqueror, while Hebrew servants stand behind him bearing the various items of tribute. Above the figures runs the inscription, "Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: Silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden ladle, golden goblets, golden pitchers, lead, a scepter for the king, and spear shafts."

This payment of tribute was in every way a most unfortunate thing for Israel. It was an open confession of weakness before the whole world. It meant that the nation was henceforth subject to Assyria, and would be expected to continue paying tribute during the years to come. Worst of all, Hazael's bitter resentment was aroused because Jehu had given comfort and aid to the enemy.

Hazael's Cruel Revenge.—When Shalmaneser at length returned to Assyria, laden with the spoils of Syria, Hazael found opportunity to settle his score against disloyal Jehu. "In those days," is the way the Biblical historian puts it, "Jehovah began to be angry with Israel; and Hazael smote them in all the territory of Israel." Hazael's vindictiveness knew no bounds. Cities were burned to the ground, the young men were slaughtered, children's brains were pitilessly dashed out against the wall, and women were butchered. All the east-Jordan land clear down to the Arnon river fell victim to his unbridled lust for revenge. Small wonder

Elijah had wept even while he anointed Hazael king!

Athaliah's Seizure of Judah's Throne.—Jehu's zeal for Jehovah had unforeseen consequences in Judah. It will be remembered that, not content with wiping out the reigning house in Israel, he had killed King Ahaziah and forty-two other members of Judah's royal family. He probably believed that in doing this he was dealing a death-blow to Baalism in the south, just as he had in the north. But he was mistaken. His deed opened the way for the enthronement in Judah of a woman who did all she could to make Baal supreme.

This woman was Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah and daughter of Jezebel and Ahab. As queen-mother under Ahaziah, she had held a position of honor and authority in the palace second only to that of the king. She had inherited from her imperious mother an enthusiastic devotion to Baal, and an audacious knack of getting what she wanted by hook or by crook. When she received the news of Ahaziah's death, she took quick action to forestall any danger of losing either her influence or her life under a new king. Before anyone knew what she was about, she put to death all her relatives of the royal stock—at least all upon whom she could lay her hands. Then, unopposed, she herself took the throne.

Strongly supported by her bodyguard of foreign soldiers, she easily overawed any attempt at rebellion. Under the royal patronage the Baal party took active control of the state. The religion of

Jehovah, crowded into second place, sought refuge in the temple. So matters continued for six years.

Joash Made King.—But a day of reckoning was at hand. Athaliah's quick wit had, unknown to her, been out-matched by that of another woman. Jehosheba, sister of the dead king and wife of the chief priest Jehoiada, had rescued Joash, one-year-old son of Ahaziah, during the confusion attendant upon Athaliah's massacre. She kept the little prince carefully concealed in the priestly apartments within the temple area during the six-year reign of Athaliah. Meanwhile, beneath the surface, agitation was constantly being carried on by the temple priests under Jehoiada against the tyrannical Baal party in power. It is to be noticed that here in Judah it was not the uncouth Sons of the Prophets, as in Israel, but the more conventional party of the priests, headed by Jehoiada, that was organizing revolution against the Baals.

When Joash had reached the age of seven years, Jehoiada concluded it was unsafe to delay action any longer. Evidently he had everything in readiness. He knew that the common people were eager for a change of government, and saw to it that the royal guards should be on his side. One day he called in the officers of the guard and showed them the young heir to the throne. The following Sabbath was designated as the date for the uprising. At the hour of changing posts, all three companies of the guards were to gather in the temple to protect the young king during the coronation ceremonies.

The program was carried out to the letter. At the appointed hour all the guards joined forces in the temple. Young Joash was brought forth, anointed and crowned in most impressive and dramatic fashion. At the conclusion of the ceremony the exultant soldiers clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

From her apartments in the palace Athaliah heard the shouting and the blowing of trumpets. She hastened to the temple to learn what was the matter. There she was astonished to find the boy king standing beside the pillar where the king always worshiped. On his head he wore the crown. About him stood the royal guard. She cried out, "Treason! treason!" But no one cared enough for this unprincipled tyrant to be willing to risk his life in her behalf. The soldiers, acting under instructions from Jehoiada, led her outside the sacred precincts and slew her just as she was passing through the horses' entry into the palace.

Then the people, led by Jehoiada, renewed their covenant of loyalty to Jehovah as their true and only God. They also pledged support to the democratic rule about to be ushered in. The people of Jerusalem, fired with religious enthusiasm, rushed to the sanctuary of Baal and destroyed it. Baal's temple, altars, images—all were smashed to bits. The priests of the impure rites were hewn down before the altars.

It was a thorough house-cleaning. With the death of the queen, her arbitrary government and the degenerate religion to which she was devoted

both passed into the shadows for a time. All the better elements in the population rejoiced in this triumph of the religion of Jehovah. After many bitter years and at the cost of fierce struggle and bloodshed, the political and religious ideals of the prophets had found their realization.

Repair of the Temple.—Throughout the earlier period of Joash's reign of forty years, Jehoiada was the king's guardian and the real ruler of the land. It was doubtless partly due to the priest's influence that the young king manifested such marked interest in the sanctuary of Jehovah. The principal event recorded of his reign is, in fact, the repair of the temple.

At its beginning, and for some time thereafter, the temple of Solomon was regarded simply as the royal chapel. Consequently the king, as a matter of course, received all revenues and paid all expenses, including repairs to the building and the support of the priests. But gradually the temple grew in importance until it became national in character. Its priests began to assert themselves. Forming a close corporation, they insisted that the temple dues belonged to them by right. By the time of Joash their claims were pretty generally acknowledged as just. He was perfectly willing to sanction the custom of turning over to them all fines and dues collected in the temple. In return he made the reasonable demand that they should see that the building was kept in repair. After some discussion this arrangement was agreed to by both sides.

The priests, however, failed to keep their part

of the contract. Joash patiently waited until the twenty-third year of his reign for them to act. Then he decided that patience had ceased to be a virtue. The temple was falling to pieces. So he devised a new system. He arranged that the priests were to keep for their own use the money paid in as trespass-offerings and sin-offerings. He also had a chest made with a slot bored in its cover. This he placed at the entrance of the temple, and commanded the priests to drop all other revenues into it. From time to time the king's agents were to collect the money from the chest, and pay it out for the labor and materials required to keep the temple in repair. The new plan worked admirably. Where the priests had proved themselves slack and unreliable in business matters, these laymen were found conscientious and faithful.

Tribute to Hazael.—One other event of the long reign of Joash was deemed worthy of notice by the historian, namely, his payment of a forced contribution to Hazael of Syria, the scourge of the West. Hazael had suffered another invasion of his land by the all-conquering Shalmaneser. This checked his activities against his neighbors for a while. During the balance of his life, however, the Assyrians remained at home, kept there by internal rebellions. So he was free once more to renew his ferocious attacks on the unlucky surrounding nations. He again overran Israel, and even extended his forays into Philistia, where Gath fell before his armies.

Jerusalem was next on his line of march. King

Joash dared offer no resistance. Stripping the palace and temple of the treasures that had accumulated since Asa had used them for a similar purpose, he sent them as tribute to the invader. Thus he bought off Hazael and saved the capital from pillage.

But Joash did not live long to enjoy the peace he had purchased. Possibly angered because he had yielded so weakly to his country's enemy, two of his officers assassinated him. The book of Chronicles, however, assigns a different reason. It states that Joash was murdered to avenge the death of the priest Zechariah, son of Jehoiada. This brave priest, it seems, had been stoned to death in the temple court by order of the king because he dared to reprove his royal master. Joash was succeeded by his vigorous son Amaziah.

Jehoahaz of Israel.—Turning back again to the northern kingdom, we learn that king Jehu had been followed by his son Jehoahaz. Terribly as Jehu had suffered at the hands of Hazael, his successor fared even worse. We read that "the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he gave them continually into the hand of Hazael, king of Syria, and into the hand of Benhadad, the son of Hazael." So thoroughly did Hazael trample Israel into the dust that Jehoahaz' army was reduced to fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot-soldiers. To such a pass had the proud kingdom come!

Reign of Jehoash Over Israel.—In the reign of Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, there came some relief

from this oppression. According to the prophetic story this deliverance was predicted by Elisha. The old prophet was on his death bed. Out of respect for him, Jehoash came to visit him at the end. The king wept at the thought of losing this staunch friend of the royal house. He voiced his grief and admiration in the very words Elisha had himself used of Elijah, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" For he knew that the passing of the prophet would be a severe blow to the nation, comparable only to the loss of its army.

But Elisha had a word of cheer for the troubled king. "Take bow and arrows," he commanded. Jehoash obeyed. "Lay your hand upon the bow," came next. Then the prophet placed his hands upon the king's hands and said, "Open the window toward the east and shoot." So he shot. Elisha cried exultantly, "Jehovah's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Syria!" Again he commanded, "Take the arrows." Jehoash did so. "Smite on the ground," he said. The king smote three times and then ceased. Elisha was disappointed. It was evident that Jehoash lacked grit and determination in the struggle for freedom.[1] "You should have smitten five or six times," he rebuked him, "then you would have smitten Syria until you had destroyed it. As it is, you will smite Syria only three times."

This was Elisha's last message. But a curious

[1] Some are inclined to the opinion that the smiting on the ground was meant to have magical effect.

story is told to show that his miraculous powers persisted even after his death. The land was constantly troubled by Moabite marauders. One day several Israelites who were burying a man saw one of their bands approaching. In haste to escape, they cast the body into Elisha's sepulcher. As soon as the corpse touched the bones of the prophet it was restored to life; the man stood up on his feet.

Jehoash did, indeed, win the three victories predicted by Elisha. He managed to recover from Benhadad the cities which Hazael had taken. In this he was aided by the fact that Benhadad was too busy with Assyria and other foes to hold on to the conquests in Israel. Apparently a rival Aramean kingdom, rising to the north of Damascus, had succeeded in humbling the pride of Syria. In addition, the Assyrians again swept westward in the year 797 B.C. King Ramman-nirari boasts of having subjugated "the West country in its entire extent, Tyre, Sidon, the land of Omri (= Israel), Edom, Philistia, as far as the great sea to the setting of the sun." His special ire, however, was vented upon Syria. Its king he quickly shut up in Damascus. Dread of the Assyrian god Asshur persuaded Benhadad to come out and surrender. "He embraced my feet," says the Assyrian, "allegiance he offered. His possessions, his property without number I received at Damascus."

Freed from the paralyzing fear of Syria, Israel now entered upon a period of expansion. Under Jehoash and his successor Jeroboam II, the nation

restored its ancient boundaries. For half a century it enjoyed great prosperity and prestige. But new dangers, social and political, were developing. In the course of time two prophets, Amos and Hosea, were called of God to oppose these evils and to lead the people into a larger conception of God and righteousness.

Amaziah's Reign in Judah.—Judah also shared in the prosperity that followed the humiliation of Syria. The first act of Amaziah, son of Joash, was to put to death the murderers of his father. Thereupon he invaded Edom, where he captured in particular a famous rocky fortress.

Puffed up by success he challenged powerful King Jehoash of Israel to battle. In reply Jehoash humorously repeated the fable of the Thistle and the Cedar: "The Thistle in Lebanon sent to the Cedar in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as wife.' But there passed by a wild beast in Lebanon and trod down the Thistle. You have, indeed, smitten Edom and your head has been turned," added Jehoash. "Glory in this and stay at home; for why should you meddle to your harm, so that you will fall and Judah with you?"

But the conceited Amaziah refused to heed this sound advice. At last Jehoash marched against Judah and inflicted a crushing defeat at Beth-Shemesh, west of Jerusalem. King Amaziah was captured. Jerusalem was taken, part of the surrounding walls broken down, and the temple and palace were plundered. Hostages were delivered

to Jehoash to keep the peace, and Judah became for a time a vassal state.

Amaziah, like his father, met his death at the hands of his own subjects. A powerful faction opposed to the king had taken possession of Jerusalem and its environs. Learning of his danger Amaziah fled to Lachish. Here he was overtaken and slain. As soon as he was out of the way the 'conspirators' put on the throne Amaziah's sixteen-year-old son Azariah, whose name is usually given in the form, Uzziah. His advent ushered in days of peace, prosperity and growth for Judah. For forty glorious years the sister kingdoms, Israel under Jeroboam II and Judah under Uzziah were to enjoy a period of good fortune such as had not been heard of since the storied days of Solomon.

Biblical passage: II Kings 10:32 to 14:29.

CHAPTER XXVI

AMOS, PIONEER IN SOCIAL REFORM

Scene at Bethel.—At Bethel, principal open-air shrine of the northern kingdom and its ecclesiastical capital, a splendid religious festival was under way. Joyous pilgrims from every section of Israel thronged the sacred precincts. The altars reeked with the blood of sacrifice; the savor of roasting flesh ascended on high. Burning incense sent its spicy fragrance through the air. All the pomp and circumstance of impressive ritual lent dignity to the occasion. Priests, clad in gorgeous robes, chanted weird melodies in praise of Jehovah, bestower of bountiful harvests and of military success. Everything seemed harmonious.

But suddenly a discordant note jangled. Over in a corner an uncouth fellow was gathering about him a group of interested listeners. His rough peasant garb, face browned by constant exposure to the weather, and the bur of the countryman from despised Judah on his tongue, made him seem strangely out of place. The authorities quickly recognized him as the prophet Amos from Tekoa in Judah, a person who had already bothered them with his insistent demands for radical reforms.

What did this man have to say to the pilgrims

who pressed about him? Skilfully he described a series of three visions. First, he narrated the vision of a locust plague sent by Jehovah to punish sinful Israel. Appearing at the time of the early spring crops, the locusts began to devour every green thing. In answer to the prophet's plea, however, Jehovah altered his original purpose and arrested the doom before it had become complete.

Fire, symbol of drought, was the subject of the second vision. Called in by Jehovah to take his part in the controversy with the sinful people, it began by drying up the Great Deep, that subterranean ocean upon which the Semites believed the earth to rest. Just as it was about to end all by consuming the solid land, the prophet sought pardon for the nation. Again Jehovah reversed his judgment.

Third and last in this vision drama, the prophet depicted Jehovah standing, plumb-line in hand, before a crumbling wall. Like a cracked and crooked wall, Israel had failed to measure up to the test of rectitude. This time Jehovah refused to alter his purpose. He decreed that the kingdom must be destroyed by desolating invasion and conquest:

> "Desolated shall be the high places of Isaac,
> And the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste;
> And I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." (7:9)

Amaziah, the supercilious high priest of Bethel, had by this time joined the company about Amos.

Shaken to the depths of his ultra-conservative being by the bold utterances of the prophet, he sent King Jeroboam this message: "Amos has conspired against you. For thus speaks Amos, 'By the sword shall Jeroboam die, and Israel shall surely go away into captivity out of its land.'" The hireling priest then turned savagely upon the speaker, and warned him to leave the country. With a sneer he intimated that Amos belonged to one of the bands of professional prophets, who had by this time acquired an unsavory reputation as mere money-getters and men-pleasers. "O gazer, begone!" he thundered. "Off with you to Judah! Earn your bread there, and there play the prophet. But at Bethel you shall prophesy no more; for it is the king's sanctuary and the royal residence."

This encounter between Amaziah and Amos is one of the really significant moments in religious history. On one side stood the priestly champion of aristocratic privilege and established custom; on the other one man, alone with God, demanding ethical and social reform. The lot of the common people through the centuries was at stake.

Amos' Defense.—Amos met the issue squarely. He opened by an indignant denial of the insinuation that he was a self-seeking prophet. "No," he cried, "but a herdsman am I, and a ripener of sycamore figs. Jehovah took me from following the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.'" Then Amos launched into wrathful denunciation of the priest who had tried to stifle the word of God. He predicted that Amaziah and his

family should be visited with unnamable cruelties of rapine and conquest in the invasion that was soon coming. "Israel shall surely go away into captivity out of its land," he solemnly concluded.

Very likely this was the last message the prophet was permitted to deliver in the North. Thus was another prophet of doom silenced! But the disaster itself came none the less surely and swiftly. Amos later wrote down for his few converts the brief summaries of his sermons preserved in the book that bears his name. If he might not speak he could at least write.

Preparation of Amos.—Whence came this bold reformer? What environment and influences helped mold him?

His home at Tekoa lay twelve miles south of Jerusalem. Although this part of Palestine once enjoyed far more rain-fall than at present, the region must always have been barren. To the southeast of Tekoa the ridges slope gradually through ever increasing desolation to the shores of the Dead Sea. It is an unpromising rocky wilderness, its scanty grass and foliage burnt brown by the parching heat during most of the year.

As peasant and herdsman in this barren land, Amos was trained in the difficult school of poverty and hardship. To secure fodder for his sheep and small cattle, he had to wage unceasing warfare against hostile nature, wild beasts and roving marauders. The coarse fruit of the sycamore trees that grew in the lower reaches toward the Dead Sea supplemented his meager shepherd diet. The

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A Shepherd in the Wilderness of Judea Near Amos' Home at Tekoa

stern environment and his ascetic manner of life were powerful factors in developing the rugged and courageous character that made him the spokesman for the rights of the common people.

It must not be imagined, however, that the desert life made the prophet narrow or provincial. The rocky heights about Tekoa supplied wide horizons that stimulated the imagination of the lonely herdsman. To one skilled as he was to interpret its signs, the wilderness throbs with unfailing interest and the sense of adventures near at hand. Nor must it be forgotten that the main highroad from the north to Hebron lay only a short hour's journey to the west of Tekoa. On this thoroughfare and in the markets where he disposed of the wool from the backs of his sheep, the prophet would meet traders and visitors from Egypt, Damascus and sometimes even distant Assyria. Amos' masterly grasp of world politics and conditions shows that he was a keen and well-informed student, not only of the past history of the great nations, but of their present ambitions as well.

Conditions Under Jeroboam II.—When Amos spoke, about the year 750 B.C., the great world empires, Egypt and Assyria, were quiet. The Syrian wars, which had so sorely drained Israel's resources, had ended some time before. Jeroboam II had shrewdness enough to take advantage of favoring conditions. He either conquered the neighboring nations or entered into favorable treaties with them. Israel became enormously rich through the spoils of war and the gains of com-

merce. It was fast becoming a nation of traders, with the city population increasing out of all due proportion. Luxury and ease were the privilege of the wealthy and nobles. It must have seemed to these that Jehovah was pleased with his people, since he had granted them such abundant prosperity and peace to enjoy it all.

For him who had eyes to see, however, there were dark clouds on the horizon. It required no magical insight to foresee that, as soon as a vigorous ruler should once more sit on her throne, Assyria would renew her claim to the West-lands, deprive Israel of her profitable conquests, and once more exact a crushing tribute. The leaders in Israel, disregarding this, chose to live in a political fool's paradise.

Internal dangers were no less real. The common people did not share the prosperity of the rich. Heavy war taxes, usurious rates of interest on loans, and corrupt judges pandering to the rich, had practically wiped out the middle class, usually the bulwark of a nation. Two classes alone remained—the wealthy rulers and the very poor. Between the two no love was lost. Debauchery, extortion and reckless waste marked the upper class. The newly-rich ladies heartlessly urged on their husbands to even more severe exactions in order that they might have ample means to continue their drunken revels. Many of the poorer citizens had been forced to sell themselves and their families into slavery to their wealthy neighbors during the crushing Syrian wars. Exploited as they were both

in war and in peace, the suffering masses had lost all loyalty to their rulers and the state. Amos, himself one of the poorest of peasants, shows clearly that the iron had entered his soul. For it is almost as one unconcerned and detached that he pronounces his messages of hopeless doom.

Religious conditions were as bad or worse. Outwardly, to be sure, religion seemed to flourish. At Gilgal, Bethel and Dan the magnificent ritual was lavishly supported. But the state church had become the servile tool of corrupt politicians and rich profiteers. In addition drunkenness and the vilest of Baalistic excesses had actually become part of the accepted worship. The priests felt no call to correct ethical or social conditions. So long as the machinery of worship functioned properly they were content. In fact they encouraged the wilful blindness of their wealthy supporters by nourishing the ancient delusion of a coming 'Day of Jehovah,' when God should personally intervene to shatter Israel's enemies and establish her absolute supremacy among the peoples of the earth. A sorry day it is for true religion when its leaders are corrupt men-pleasers!

Amos' Appeal.—Against this whole state of affairs Amos flung himself with all his might. He boldly exposed the evils, and pleaded for justice and righteousness in both private and public life. His ethical and religious standards were so far in advance of those of his predecessors as to be little short of miraculous. He seems the most modern of prophets, for his teachings are as applicable to-

day as they were when he uttered them. Although he turned now and again to the past for illustration or example, he was anything but a narrow traditionalist. His message was the result of superior moral insight applied to the actual conditions of his day. He was the eloquent herald of a God with a conscience. His visions do not appear to be so much the products of trance states as a sort of vivid picture thinking. To crown all, he skilfully clothed his thoughts in the impressive measured beat and parallelism of inspired Hebrew poetry.

Judgment Upon the Nations.—When we examine the connected discourses of Amos, we discover that the longest of these is the one contained in the first two chapters. It is in artistic stanza form. Opening with a series of oracles against Israel's heathen neighbors, it works to a climax in its indictment of Israel herself. The prophet accuses the heathen nations of the worst sins of barbarism; Israel he charges with the far more damning sins of an advanced but decadent civilization.

Syria, Philistia, Ammon, and Moab[1] are unsparingly condemned by him for shameless acts of atrocity and impiety that violate every rule of war. Jehovah's agent of destruction (Assyria) will therefore visit them with dire disaster and overthrow them. To this amply deserved judgment the hearers of Amos were doubtless ready to nod their approval.

[1] The prophecies against Tyre, Edom and Judah seem to be from a later writer who sought to complete the list up to his own time.

But the prophet does not stop here. Having tactfully established the principle that sin merits punishment, he applies that principle to Israel. Israel is in his opinion even more guilty than her less enlightened heathen neighbors. Her crimes are committed, not against national enemies, but against her own citizens. They are the cruelly refined sins of the heartless rich and ruling classes: drunkenness, unchastity, usury, enslavement of fellow-Hebrews. As a contrast to this Amos reminds them of the kindness and patience of Jehovah in the whole course of Israel's history. Their callousness to all his goodness will force Jehovah to bring upon them speedily dark days of calamity, when "refuge shall fail the swift" and "he who is stoutest of heart among warriors shall flee away naked."

Results of Amos' Preaching.—Thus did Amos accuse, warn, threaten, and exhort the leaders of Israel to mend their ways and save the nation from approaching ruin. But the habit of corruption was too strong. The work of the prophet caused scarcely a ripple in the smug complacency of Israel. In the addresses of Hosea a few years later we perceive the nation still drifting, irresolutely but swiftly, to its doom.

Nevertheless the work of Amos was very far from being a total failure. If he failed to influence his own age to any considerable degree, he has on the other hand guided and inspired those who in later generations have sought to establish a better social and religious order. Because he built on the rock of eternal principles, his work can never

be swept away. In his noblest utterance he enunciates, in sharp contrast with merely formal worship, the ethical basis of all lasting reform:

"Let Justice roll down as waters,
And Righteousness as an ever-flowing stream." (5:24)

Biblical passage: The Book of Amos.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOSEA, PROPHET OF DIVINE LOVE

Israel		Judah	
Zechariah,	743	Jotham,	740-736
Shallum,	743	Ahaz,	736-720
Menahem,	743-737		
Pekahiah,	737-736		
Pekah,	736-732		
Hoshea,	732-722		

Anarchy in Israel.—When Amos appeared at Bethel, the northern kingdom was at the peak of a period of remarkable prosperity. The prophet consequently found few to share his forebodings with regard to approaching disasters. But the death of Jeroboam II a few years after considerably changed the aspect of affairs. The nation was soon forced to realize that it was going downhill at a dangerous pace. Within a dozen years six kings occupied the throne. Four of these were assassinated; only one was strong enough to hand down the rule to his son. No monarch appeared with sufficient vigor to stem the drift toward national disintegration.

It is open to question whether, under prevailing world conditions, even the ablest of rulers could

have accomplished much. Assyria was again pressing rapidly to the fore as a dominating power in international politics. In the year 745 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser III ascended the throne. A man of remarkable energy and force of character, he determined to force the rebellious western states once more into subjugation. His methods were such as to inspire universal terror. It had been the custom of his predecessors to rest content with the regular payment of tribute by the native princes of conquered nations. He, however, instituted the practice of deposing these rulers and supplanting them by creatures of his own choosing. In addition he used to deport a large proportion of the leading inhabitants to remote sections, where they must live side by side with alien races. This had the effect of separating related peoples, and discouraging any united resistance to Assyrian domination.

Details of Israel's history during these troublous times are extremely scanty. We learn that Jeroboam was succeeded by his son, Zechariah. After a short period of six months the new king fell by an assassin's dagger. With him ended ignominiously the dynasty of Jehu. Shallum, his murderer, lasted barely a month, when he in turn perished at the hands of Menahem. This new usurper, a thoroughly brutal soldier of fortune, had to deal with the Assyrians. In 738 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser invaded the land. Rather than offer battle, Menahem paid as tribute to the conqueror an amount equal in value to millions of dollars today. In return the Assyrian king assisted him in putting

down the rival party in Israel, thus enabling him to establish himself firmly on the throne. To make good his payment to Assyria, Menahem turned on Israel's men of wealth, those heartless plutocrats upon whom Amos had so freely vented his scorn, and forced each to give him fifty shekels of silver.

His payment of tribute enabled Menahem to retain the kingship during the rest of his lifetime, and to bequeath it to his son Pekahiah. In a little over a year's time, however, Pekah, commander-in-chief of the troops, conspired against Pekahiah and slew him in the palace.

Very likely Pekah was leader of the anti-Assyrian faction, which resented the fact that Israel's king ruled as a vassal of the world power. At any rate the first act of this latest military usurper was to combine with King Rezin of Syria against Assyria. Ahaz, king of Judah, was invited to join the coalition. When he refused the two kings tried to force him. Declaring war, they invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem.

Ahaz was thus placed in a desperate dilemma. If he joined the rebels, he feared the wrath of the all-powerful Assyrians. If on the other hand he should turn to Assyria, he feared the invaders at his door, with whose program many of his own patriotic enthusiasts were in heartiest sympathy. After much indecision he decided to cast in his lot with the Assyrians. He collected all the treasures of the palace and the temple and sent them to Tiglath-Pileser. "I am your servant and your son," he wrote, "come up and save me from the king

of Syria and the king of Israel who are attacking me."

The great king needed little urging. He immediately put his armies on the march. In 734 B.C. Gilead and Galilee fell before him, and many of their inhabitants were carried off into captivity. Then he swept back to Damascus and started to besiege it. After two years it fell. Rezin was slain and his subjects were deported to the east in large numbers. Neither Israel nor Syria ever recovered from their crushing defeat. Samaria was spared the horrors of conquest because Hoshea, leader of the pro-Assyrian party in Israel, murdered Pekah, made himself ruler, and became a vassal of Tiglath-Pileser. As such he was required to pay a large annual tribute from the already depleted treasury.

But Hoshea soon found his position exceedingly irksome. The tribute was a heavy drain, and he longed for a freer hand in the government. He, therefore, took advantage of the death of Tiglath-Pileser in 727 to make proposals to Egypt for united action against Assyria.

Shalmaneser V was the new king of Assyria. When he learned how affairs stood in Israel, he angrily descended upon treacherous Hoshea and took him prisoner. Determined to end forever the intrigues of Israel he marched to the siege of Samaria, the capital. With desperate tenacity the citizens resisted the attack for two terrible years. Shalmaneser did not live to reap the fruits of conquest. But in the first year of his successor Sargon

II (722-705) Samaria's end came. Amid scenes of indescribable suffering over twenty-seven thousand of the better class were swept off into captivity.

Scattered as fragments among the nations, their God apparently unable to save them, the ten northern tribes soon lost their identity. In the bitter struggle for existence among strangers they either perished or were gradually absorbed by the surrounding people. The lower-class Israelites, who had been left behind in the province of Samaria, saw large portions of their most desirable land turned over to the foreign colonists who had been transported thither by the Assyrians. The territory of Israel was made part of an Assyrian province and ceased to have a separate existence. Thus, after a little over two centuries of troubled existence, the independent kingdom established by the patriotic Jeroboam perished from the face of the earth. From this time forward Judah alone carried on the thread of Hebrew tradition.

The Prophet Hosea.—It was during the earlier ten years of this period of anarchy that the prophet Hosea lived and loved and taught. He began a short time before the death of Jeroboam II. His ministry extended into the frenzied times of the beginnings of revolution and assassination in Israel. However, he seems to know nothing of the attack of Israel and Syria upon Judah in 735, nor of the deportation of the Gileadites by Assyria in 734. Between 745 and 735, then, he began and completed his prophetic career.

Unlike Amos, Hosea was himself a citizen of the

northern kingdom whose sins he exposes. He is the only prophet of northern Israel whose sayings have been preserved. He was not a peasant, but belonged to the very families of standing and substance whose inhumanity Amos had so bitingly condemned. Speaking thus against his own nation and perhaps against his own relatives, Hosea never exhibits that detachment of spirit that sometimes makes Amos seem hardly more sympathetic than a cold, brilliant diamond. His messages are surcharged with the white heart of intense emotion.

Hosea's Family Tragedy.—In obscure language Hosea hesitatingly relates the tragic domestic experiences that made him a national prophet of the love of God. In the sunny days of his early manhood he married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. Three children came to brighten their home. He called the first, a boy, by the symbolic name 'Jezreel,' as a sign of the rapidly approaching end of the dynasty of Jehu. By the time the second child, a daughter, was born, Hosea had begun to suspect that his wife was unfaithful to him. So he named the forlorn little girl, 'Unpitied.' Before the third child came Hosea was certain that Gomer was untrue and that the boy was the son of another father. He accordingly gave him the ominous name, 'Not-my-kin.'

Then the faithless wife tired of husband and children. She ran away from home and gave herself up to a life of shameless pleasure. Doubtless the same sort of thing was occurring in many a

Hebrew household during those days. The old restraints of family morality were going fast before the onslaughts of the voluptuous Baal religion. Perhaps Hosea's puritanic mode of life bored this woman, with her eager desire for excitement.

For a number of years Gomer, disregarding the prophet's earnest entreaties, continued in her life of shame. Deeper and deeper she sank into the mire. At last she reached the inevitable end of her career of dissipation. Forsaken by all her lovers, she was brought to the market place and exposed for sale as a common slave.

Through all these bitter experiences Hosea's love for the erring woman still persisted. When the last disgrace came, he could not bear to think of her becoming the property of evil men. So he bought her for the price of a slave. But he could not yet bring himself to restore the fallen woman to her old place as wife and mother in the home. She must first pass through a period of discipline and testing, in order that she might have opportunity to repent of her sin and appreciate the love that sought her in her degradation.

Whether Gomer responded to Hosea's kindness is not stated. But it is clear that he stood ready and eager to forgive and restore her whenever she should show signs of real contrition. This true tale of the Prodigal Wife is worthy to stand beside the story that Jesus told about a certain Prodigal Son. In the story of Guinevere and King Arthur we have a still closer parallel.

Effect on the Prophet's Preaching.—Hosea's

earlier sermons are as stern as those of Amos. And in the first revulsion of feeling after the discovery of his wife's shame, he bestowed upon his children names that are expressive of a certain harshness. But suffering softened him. When he at last took back his wife and discovered how deeply he still loved her, the new note of tenderness crept even more distinctly into his preaching. He translated his own experience with Gomer into terms of Jehovah's dealings with Israel. He even adopted from the Baal worship the daring figure of Jehovah as Israel's *husband* from wilderness days. In spite of Jehovah's tender, pleading love and care, the nation had proved untrue and had played the harlot in worshiping the Baals of the land. But if the prophet still loved Gomer, how much more true was it that Jehovah could never cease to care for Israel.

The prophet never even hinted that Jehovah overlooked or condoned the sins of his people; nor was the coming punishment any the less sure or severe. But behind all was the affectionate, passionate, forgiving divine love, like unto that with which a man loves an erring wife. Punishment and discipline must come to Israel as to Gomer, but even this was to be but another expression of God's love.

Hosea differed from Amos in that he viewed the coming disaster only as loving chastisement, not as the final destruction of the nation. In the blackest clouds of the approaching storm he saw a "door of hope" opening wide. Jehovah would yet

redeem and restore a chastened and repentant Israel.

Message of Hosea.—In the three opening chapters of Hosea we find the account of his family tragedy and its parallel in Israel's relationship to her divine husband. Chapters four to fourteen are made up of more or less disconnected extracts from the sermons preached during the troubled period of national decline in the later days of the prophet's career. The whole book vibrates with a passionate emotion that becomes at times too intense for logical or coherent utterance. Two fundamental ideas run like scarlet threads through the book: (1) Israel's sin will surely be punished; (2) Jehovah's love can never permanently let his sinful people go.

The great sinfulness of the nation is reflected in the arraignment:

> "Hear the word of Jehovah, children of Israel!
> Jehovah has a quarrel with the inhabitants of the land;
> For there is no truth, nor kindness,
> Nor knowledge of God in the land,
> But perjury and murder and theft and adultery and violence.
> Bloodshed quickly follows bloodshed.
> Therefore the land mourns,
> And everything that dwells therein languishes." (4:1-3)

But the prophet can hardly find it in his heart to blame the people. The corrupt priests have led them astray so that they are "perishing for lack of knowledge." Hosea, therefore, continues:

> "Yet let no man find fault,
> Let none rebuke.
> For my people are but like their priestlings." (4:4)

These priests are even accused by him of robbery and murder.

Political conditions are well-nigh hopeless. King and princes and nobles alike are slaves to strong drink and dissipation. Intrigue and assassination keep the land in constant ferment. The policy of vacillating between Egypt and Assyria increases the danger from without:

> "Ephraim (Israel)—he mixes himself among the nations:
> Ephraim is a cake not turned." (7:8)

Jehovah's tender regard for Israel is depicted by the prophet in a series of beautiful figures. In Israel's youth he found her as luscious grapes in the wilderness, or as the first-ripe among the figs. Again she is described as having formerly been a luxuriant and fruitful vine. Elsewhere she is thought of as a well-trained heifer, willing to receive Jehovah's yoke. Perhaps the most striking passage of all is that in which Jehovah is represented as dealing with Israel as with a little child, teaching him to walk and healing his infant bruises:

> "When Israel was a child, then I loved him,
> And from Egypt I called him to be my son." (11:1)

But the people have rebelled against their God and have turned to the Baals. Injustice, bribery, adultery, thievery—in fact, every possible sin against Jehovah's love—are practised by them. As God of justice and righteousness Jehovah cannot withhold the punishment they so richly deserve. Therefore he cries:

"Shall I deliver them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from death? Nay!
Hither with thy plagues, O death!
Hither with thy destruction, O Sheol!
Compassion is hidden from my eyes." (13:14)

This might seem to be the end. Amos would have stopped here. But Hosea cannot believe that punishment is all. He pictures God struggling within himself as strict justice and forgiving love fight for the mastery:

"How can I give thee up, Ephraim?
Or abandon thee, Israel?
My heart is turned within me
My compassion is all aglow,
I cannot carry out the fierceness of my anger,
I cannot again destroy Ephraim.
For I am God and not man,
The Holy One in thy midst;
Therefore I will not come to consume." (11:8, 9)

Jehovah will punish the sinful kingdom, but he cannot absolutely annihilate it.

In his beautiful closing chapter Hosea places on the lips of repentant Israel a prayer for pardon. In reply Jehovah graciously assures the nation that he will yet forgive and heal and restore. "I will be as the dew to Israel" is the promise. Thus again divine hope shines through the difficult days through which the kingdom was passing in the days of anarchy.

Of all the notable sayings of the prophet, the greatest is perhaps the one:

"I desire kindness and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings."
(6:6)

This passage reflects the conviction of all the early prophets that ritual and form were of little value as compared with ethics and life. It makes central what was central in the life experience of Hosea—"love," or "kindness," as the word is variously translated. It is not a mere accident that Jesus treasured these words, and quoted them more than once.

Importance of Hosea.—Hosea's loving ministry was as barren of immediate results as that of Amos had been. The nation was in no mood to listen to any prophet of reform, no matter how eloquent or earnest he might be. Matters drifted from bad to worse until in 722 the final crash came.

Nevertheless Hosea is an extremely important figure in Hebrew history. He stands for a great forward step in religion. This is so because of three great things he did: (1) He reaffirmed in more spiritual terms the old conception that Israel was in a peculiar sense God's chosen people. The nation needed some such reminder that it had enjoyed great privileges, which involved corresponding responsibilities. (2) He made people think of a personal God—not a blind, absolute force, but a living, loving, agonizing individual who really cared. (3) He made love the central and vital element in religion. God's love for his people was for him a tender, abiding affection full of real feeling, the greatest reality in the universe. This

love awakens a returning affection in human hearts. "We love him because he first loved us." It has been well said that if ethical Amos is the Saint James of the Old Testament, then loving Hosea is the Saint John.

From expiring Israel Hosea's message passed to Judah. In Isaiah and his successors it found ever fuller expression. Especially do Jeremiah, and the Great Unknown of Isaiah 40 to 66, and Jesus himself reflect Hosea's spirit and teaching in supreme degree.

Biblical passages: II Kings 15-17; Hosea 4-6; 11-14.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ISAIAH THE STATESMAN-PROPHET

Assyria

Tiglath-Pileser III,	745-727
Shalmaneser V,	727-722
Sargon II,	722-705
Sennacherib,	705-681

Israel and Judah.—From the time of Rehoboam on, the kingdom of Judah had been constantly overshadowed by her more powerful neighbor, Israel. Both in politics and commerce Israel proved by far the more important of the two. It is a striking fact that, whereas Assyrian inscriptions mention Israel fairly often, Judah is seldom referred to and then usually as a mere satellite of the northern kingdom. Apparently Judah was poor and insignificant and out of touch with the main currents of international life.

Religiously, too, Israel led. For example, the activity of the enthusiastic Sons of the Prophets was much more evident in the North than in the South. Furthermore, three out of the four outstanding religious geniuses of the period—Elijah, Elisha, and Hosea—were citizens of Israel. Amos, indeed, came from the south; but his message was delivered at the northern shrine of Bethel.

It would seem that the throbbing, intense, wide-visioned life of Israel had stirred up the patriotic and religious zeal of its spokesmen for Jehovah.

Not all the advantage lay with Israel, however. As the buffer state it was constantly open to devastating invasions. Internal revolutions also bled her of her resources in wealth and young manhood. The very remoteness and insignificance of Judah saved her from much of this confusion, and gave her opportunity to establish a stable state under the Davidic dynasty. The presence of the temple made for religious conservatism, so that the worship was not so frequently contaminated by strange cults like Baalism as in more cosmopolitan Israel. Despite certain abuses that crept in, the purer ethical standards of the simple Jehovah religion prevailed in worship and ritual.

Reign of Uzziah.—With the enthronement of Uzziah in 779 B.C. Judah began to emerge from the obscurity of centuries, and soon assumed a new importance in Palestinian affairs. Uzziah proved himself a remarkably capable and forceful ruler. He defeated the Philistines on the west, the Arabians on the south and the Ammonites on the east. Nor did he neglect the internal resources of the kingdom. He strengthened the defenses of the exposed portions of the land, and aided agriculture by increasing the water supply. His wise economic measures greatly increased Judah's wealth and material splendor, and his shrewd and vigorous statesmanship vastly enhanced her commerce and foreign prestige.

Prosperity proved fatal to Judah's highest interests, however, just as it did for Israel. Nearly all the gains of trade and conquest were appropriated by the rich, the nobles, and the military aristocracy. The rights of the ordinary citizen and the claims of the poor were contemptuously ignored. Justice was sold to the highest bidder, widows and orphans were robbed of their inheritances, and the peasant farmer was driven from his small holding in order that the rich lord might increase the size of his estates. Luxury, drunkenness, immorality on the one hand; on the other, abject misery and grinding poverty! Religion became increasingly a matter of splendid form and costly sacrifice; it lacked ethical content or motive.

Toward the end of Uzziah's long reign the danger from Assyria became acute. Tiglath-Pileser III had mounted the throne and was about to begin his great western campaigns. It was simply a matter of time before Judah would have to deal with him. Nevertheless the selfish and degenerate rulers of Judah, like those of Israel, deliberately chose to shut their eyes to the rapidly approaching peril.

During his last years King Uzziah was afflicted with the loathsome and incurable disease of leprosy. He was able, however, to continue the direction of affairs from the seclusion of his own apartment. Jotham, his son, was appointed regent and took charge of formal affairs of state. The son was apparently a man of only average force and ability. In view of the extremely critical internal and ex-

ternal problems demanding attention, many must have looked forward with apprehension to the time when Zzziah's strong hand should be removed.

Isaiah's Call.—In the year that King Uzziah died (about 740 B.C.), the youthful Isaiah received his call as prophet. He had gone to the temple to worship. As he remained at the threshold praying, the outward symbols of the sanctuary seemed to merge before him into the great spiritual realities for which they stood. Instead of the ark, emblem of Jehovah's presence, he saw the Lord himself "sitting upon a throne high and lifted up; and the skirts of his robe filled the temple." The cherubim of wood and gold that guarded the ark became shining companies of angelic seraphim, singing responsively:

> "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts;
> The whole earth is full of His glory." (6:3)

As their anthem rolled majestically forth, the very foundations of the threshold seemed to tremble beneath the young worshiper, and the house filled with smoke.

Overcome with the sense of his own sin and unworthiness, Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." Then there flew to him one of the seraphim, bearing in his hand a glowing stone taken from the altar. With this he touched his mouth,

saying, "Lo, your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged."

Presently Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Willingly, eagerly, he replied, "Here am I; send me." To his unhesitating response came a strange answer: "Go and say to this people, 'Hear ye indeed, but understand not; see ye indeed, but know not.' Make fat the heart of this people, and their ears make heavy, and their eyes besmear, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and their heart understand, and they turn and be healed."

No prophet, we may be sure, was ever given such a hopeless commission at the very beginning of his career. In these puzzling words we can see clearly reflected, however, the experiences of the opening years of Isaiah's ministry. When, after some years, he came to write down what happened on that wonderful day in the temple, he included in the call the sad fact that his preaching had actually hardened, rather than softened, the hearts of those who heard his message.

Isaiah's Place Among the Prophets.—With the joyous sense of freedom and boldness that marked his acceptance of this call, Isaiah continued his ministry to the nation through forty eventful years or more. He was essentially a city man, a native of Jerusalem. It is significant that all his interests center about the capital, its people, its dangers, its future. His easy access to the court, and his intimate acquaintance with leaders in church and state,

indicate that he was a member of the upper classes, perhaps himself a nobleman.

From Amos and Hosea he inherited many of his stirring social and religious ideals. But he shows an advance upon them in that his position at the court led him increasingly into the field of practical politics. He proved to be the greatest statesman Judah ever produced. Although his advice was often carelessly disregarded or even flatly rejected, his keen insight and preëminent ability made him a person to be reckoned with in the discussion of every grave national issue.

Isaiah was the most brilliant among the many notable orators of ancient Israel. He possessed an alert and powerful mind. He knew the traditions of the past as well as world conditions of his own day. He was one of the rare geniuses who combine delicate poetic feeling with a practical grasp of affairs. Like Milton among English writers he drew his similes and metaphors, not from the low and commonplace, but from the sublime and exalted. His style is clear, forceful, incisive, effective. For the most part his addresses are in the powerful balanced parallelism of Hebrew verse. Animating all his thought is a splendid breadth of human sympathy and a sublime devotion to the God of Israel. His combination of qualities rank him as one of the few really great speakers of the world.

The Book of Isaiah.—Once the late portions of the book of Isaiah have been recognized as such, and the scattered passages approximately dated, a

tolerably clear idea of the prophet's life and work is secured. For convenience his oracles may be grouped about five periods: (1) the early reform sermons, 740 to 736 B.C.; (2) his advice to Ahaz in 735; (3) the fall of Israel in 722; (4) the rebellion against Sargon in 711; (5) the period of the revolt against Sennacherib, 704 to 701.

Early Reform Sermons.—During the greater part of the brief reign of Jotham, Uzziah's successor, over Judah, Israel was passing through the agonies of anarchy and invasion. In the political life of the southern kingdom, on the contrary, very little that was worthy of notice occurred. Isaiah's preaching during this period concerned itself almost exclusively with the need for social reform. The rank injustice practised by the strong and privileged classes was his main theme. Himself a member of the aristocracy, he knew and hated their selfish sins. With all the eloquence of which he was such a past master, he tried to drive home the conviction that Jehovah would surely punish these corrupt leaders for their cruel oppression and debauchery; and that with them the whole nation must suffer.

Chapter five, with its tactful introduction, may well come from this earliest preaching of Isaiah. Addressing an audience in a Jerusalem square or temple court, perhaps on the occasion of a solemn festival, he began with the popular folk-song of the vineyard:

> "Let me sing for my beloved,
> A love song concerning his vineyard.
> My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill-top;

And he digged it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines.
He built a tower in its midst, and also hewed out a wine-press therein;
And he looked that it should yield grapes, and it yielded wild grapes."

Thereupon the prophet requested his hearers to pass judgment upon the vineyard. When they signified their agreement that the owner was justified in laying it waste and abandoning it, he swiftly turned his parable against them. He represented Israel as the vineyard and Jehovah as its owner:

"For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel,
And the men of Judah are the planting in which he delighted;
And he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed,
For righteousness, but behold, a cry."

The rest of the address is devoted to a striking series of woes upon Judah's leaders. With passionate indignation, Isaiah lays bare the shocking crimes which have forced Jehovah to abandon his vineyard, Judah. Land monopoly, drunkenness, cynicism, irreverence, bribery—these sins of its leaders have crowded the nation to the brink of ruin. In the closing verses of the chapter he pictures Jehovah signalling to a distant nation (Assyria) to come speedily and punish his wicked people.

The remaining social sermons from about this time (2:6 to 4:1; 9:8 to 10:4) eloquently strike the same note of Judah's incurable guilt and her

sure doom. What results came from this preaching we do not know. Isaiah himself apparently believed that his efforts had dismally failed (6:9, 10).

Advice to Ahaz in 735 B.C.—It will be remembered that king Ahaz sent tribute to Tiglath-Pileser in order to bribe him to attack Pekah and Rezin in the rear, and thus save Judah from invasion at their hands. Isaiah was not in sympathy with this policy of paying the Assyrians for doing what they probably intended to do anyway. So he confronted the king one day as he was inspecting the defenses and water supply of the capital. It was a decisive moment in the history of Hebrew prophecy. The prophet urged, "Take heed and be quiet. Fear not, neither be faint-hearted, because of the fierce anger of these two stumps of smoldering firebrands, Rezin and Pekah. Their evil plan against you shall not stand nor come to pass. . . . But if ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

Isaiah was thus counseling faith in Jehovah rather than reliance on the vain strength of man. Seeing that Ahaz was not convinced he offered him a sign. "Ask a sign of Jehovah, your God," he urged, "make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But the king had already committed himself by sending his messengers to the king of Assyria. So he abruptly refused to seek a sign. The prophet was indignant. "Is it too small a thing for you to weary men," he thundered, "that you must weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Im-

manuel (God-with-us). Before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you abhor shall be forsaken. Jehovah will also bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house days such as have not come since Ephraim separated from Judah." Ahaz was to receive a sign whether he would or no. Not only were Israel and Syria to be devastated; Judah would also suffer severely because of the obstinacy and faithlessness of her king. Within two or three years at the most, according to this Immanuel sign, the wisdom of Isaiah's policy of neutrality would be evident.

Still the king ignored the urgent warning. Isaiah, therefore, appealed from him to the people. On a large, smooth tablet, which he probably set up in some public place, he inscribed in plain and legible characters the title: Haste Spoil, Speed Prey. The meaning was that Judah, as well as Syria and Israel, would soon suffer the horrors of conquest unless Ahaz ceased dealing with Assyria. To a child born to the prophet's wife about this time, the same title was given as his name. The eloquent address in chapter 17, which pictures the speedy downfall of the two northern kingdoms, was also spoken during this period.

Neither king nor people, however, were disposed to heed Isaiah's counsels of neutrality. They preferred to trust Assyria's arm of flesh rather than Jehovah's spiritual might. The prophet, therefore, turned to the small band of earnest disciples who had come over to his side, and entrusted to them

his teachings. He was content to wait patiently for the future to prove the truth of his message.

Nor did he wait long. Tiglath-Pileser came on with his irresistible cohorts and overran Israel. By 732 B.C. Damascus had also fallen. Syria never reappeared as an independent power. Both Rezin and Pekah lost their lives. While the conquering Assyrian held court in Damascus, Ahaz came before him to render homage. As a vassal of Assyria Judah was soon paying an enormous annual tribute. Had the nation followed Isaiah's advice and remained neutral it might have struck a better bargain or, perhaps, even escaped notice altogether.

Biblical passages: II Kings 15:1-7; II Chronicles 26; Isaiah 6; 5; 2:6 to 4:1; 9:8 to 10:4; 7; 8; 17:1-11.

CHAPTER XXIX

ISAIAH THE ARISTOCRAT AND MICAH THE DEMOCRAT

JUDAH
Hezekiah, 720-692

Isaiah and Micah.—Shortly before the final collapse of Israel in 722, there arose in Judah a new prophet to supplement Isaiah's work. The man who thus took up the cudgels in behalf of social righteousness was Micah, an inhabitant of a remote village, Moresheth of Gath, situated in the fertile Shephelah southwest of Jerusalem.

Micah was animated by the same burning passion for justice and social reform as was Isaiah. But in almost every other respect he was as different from the older prophet as could well be imagined. Isaiah was a citizen of the national capital, a thorough aristocrat and royalist, perfectly at home in the palace. Micah was a rough peasant from an outlying village far from the feverish life of crowded cities; he was, moreover, intensely democratic in outlook and feeling. Isaiah had heard God's voice calling him to service out of the gorgeous pomp of the temple service; Micah heard it in the agonized cry of suffering and need that rose from the throats of his downtrodden neighbors and

friends. In Micah there appears a certain savage vindictiveness that is absent from the lofty utterances of Isaiah. Nor was the rustic prophet particularly interested in the tremendous political problems that so deeply concerned his older contemporary; he insisted solely on the reform of social and religious abuses. The majestic and richly imaginative style of Isaiah, furthermore, stands in sharp contrast to the plain, direct, almost blunt manner of Micah.

Curiously enough, we have no evidence that these two prophets were acquainted. Neither refers to the other. Their lives seem to have run in separate channels. Isaiah stood out in his own generation as an influential shaper of political and religious opinion; the more obscure Micah was evidently a far less impressive figure. In view of this lack of vital contact in the activities of the two men, we shall finish our consideration of Isaiah's ministry during this quarter century before dealing with that of Micah.

Isaiah and Israel's Fall.—No observer in Judah, least of all her eminent statesman-prophet, could possibly have remained indifferent to the stirring tragedies that were being enacted in Israel just before the year 722. It is not surprising, therefore, that Isaiah's earlier utterances contain frequent references to the calamities that were overwhelming the sister kingdom. Whatever sympathy he may have felt for Israel was counterbalanced, however, by his deep conviction that she richly deserved her fate. Incidentally, he found in her punishment the

finest possible argument for the reforms he was urging upon careless and frivolous Judah.

In one of his later sermons to his own nation these words, originally addressed to Israel near the year 725, are incorporated:

> "Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,
> And the fading flower of his glorious beauty,
> Which crowns the fertile valley of those overcome with wine!
> Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one,
> One who, like a tempest of hail, like a destructive storm,
> Like a tempest of mighty waters overflowing,
> Casts down to the earth with violence.
>
> Underfoot shall be trampled the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim;
> And the fading flower of his glorious beauty,
> Which crowns the fertile valley,
> Shall be like the first-ripe fig before the harvest,
> Which as soon as one sees it,
> While it is yet in his hand he eats it." (28: 1-4)

By the 'proud crown' the prophet seems to mean the circle of towers that girdled Samaria, Israel's magnificent capital. Evidently Isaiah could see nothing but destruction in store for the guilty kingdom. His gloomy expectations were fully realized in the capture of Samaria and the deportation of Israel's leaders in 722. Judah kept out of this revolt against Assyria and was, therefore, spared by Sargon.

Rebellion against Sargon in 711.—For some years after 722 the Palestinian states remained quiet. But Egypt soon began to stir up another rebellion against Assyria. The Philistine city of

Ashdod was now persuaded to take the lead. In Judah, meanwhile, Ahaz had been succeeded by his more ambitious and heroic-spirited son, Hezekiah. He was inclined to join the plot.

Isaiah was decidedly opposed to this futile attempt. Although he had originally advised against an alliance with Assyria, now that Judah was actually her vassal he believed it the part of wisdom to keep the compact. He adopted most extraordinary methods in his endeavor to keep Judah out of the uprising. For three years this courtier and aristocrat walked the streets of Jerusalem barefoot, clad only in the scanty garb of a captive. He explained this object lesson by declaring, "So shall the king of Assyria lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their bodies exposed." His efforts were in vain. Hezekiah finally brought Judah into the alliance.

Sargon descended upon the rebellious Philistine cities with lightning speed. Ashdod fell before the commander of his armies in 711. Fortunately Judah and the other states of Palestine had not entered so deeply into the plot as to prevent their making a passable peace with the Assyrian king. Egypt and Ethiopia also escaped for the time being the dire fate Isaiah had predicted for them.

Revolt against Sennacherib.—Disappointed in this last attempt against Assyria, Egypt patiently bided her time. When, in 705, the dreaded Sargon died, she saw her opportunity. The new king, Sennacherib, was engaged in putting down rebel-

lions in the East. In particular, Merodach-Baladan of Babylon, who had previously been a thorn in the side of Assyria, had raised the standard of revolt. It was his intention that Babylon, and not Assyria, should henceforth be mistress of the world. Until Sennacherib had settled with this dangerous upstart, no Assyrian troops could be spared for western campaigns. As a consequence, the intrigues of Egypt were again successful in fullest measure. Throughout the western lands swept the flames of rebellion. Tyre, Philistia, Moab, Edom, Ammon, and some of the neighboring Bedouin tribes, joined the coalition. Both Egypt and Merodach-Baladan promised substantial aid.

Some of Isaiah's most brilliant prophecies were delivered at this time, in a vain endeavor to keep Judah out of the plot. He still insisted that the nation keep faith with Assyria. Against the pro-Egyptian party he directed his bitterest sarcasm. Egypt he called by the nickname 'Braggart-that-sits-still.'

While the discussion raged, Hezekiah fell desperately ill. Upon his miraculous recovery, Merodach-Baladan sent a deputation on the pretext of offering congratulations. In reality they came to persuade Judah to join the revolt, so that Sennacherib's attention might be further distracted from the revolution in Babylon. Isaiah reproached Hezekiah for receiving these messengers and displaying to them his treasures. "The days are coming," said he, "when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up until this

day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left." It was no part of Isaiah's intention that Judah should act as catspaw either for Babylon or for Egypt.

Submission to Assyria, avoidance of all alliances, trust in Jehovah—these were the principles the prophet urged. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength," he assured Judah's rulers. But these men, stubborn in the belief that they knew more about political affairs than the idealistic prophet, resented his advice. They made fun of him as of one who forever sang the same monotonous refrain. "Precept upon precept," they mocked, "precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little." Blindly they assumed a position of leadership in the alliance against Assyria.

Sennacherib was in the meantime stamping out the eastern revolts. He conquered Merodach-Baladan in 704. Then he sent an expedition against Media. At last, in the year 701, he was free to settle accounts with the rebels in the West. With his powerful army he swept down the Mediterranean coast. The foolish allied states, instead of combining forces, met him singly in their own territories. This made his task easy. Most of Phœnicia fell before him almost immediately. Moab, Ammon and Edom hastened to save themselves by submitting without fighting. Judah and Philistia, however, held out. The Egyptians kept their promises to the extent of sending a force to the relief of Philistine Ekron. But in a battle

fought at Eltekeh in southern Philistia, they were shamefully beaten. Ekron was obliged to surrender; its leading citizens were cruelly put to death.

Thereupon Sennacherib turned upon Judah. His own account of the Judean campaign reads as follows: "Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to me, forty-six of his fortified towns, together with innumerable fortresses and small towns in their neighborhood, with assault and battering-rams and approach of siege-engines, with the attack of infantry, of mines—I besieged, I captured. Two hundred thousand, one hundred and fifty persons, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen and sheep, without number, from their midst I brought out and reckoned them as spoil. Himself I shut up like a bird in a cage in Jerusalem, his royal city." This agrees with Isaiah's description:

> "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire,
> Your land, strangers are devouring it before your eyes.
> And the daughter of Zion (Jerusalem) is left like a booth in a vineyard,
> Like a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, like a besieged city." (1:7, 8)

Hezekiah was obliged to pay an enormous fine, and to send his daughters and concubines to swell Sennacherib's harem at Nineveh. Thereupon the conqueror withdrew for awhile.

But the Assyrian monarch was not yet entirely satisfied. Soon he sent a detachment to Jerusalem with an insulting demand that it open its gates in submission to him. His slighting reference to

Israel's God aroused the wrath of Isaiah. When Hezekiah in panic sent messengers to inquire of the prophet, Isaiah issued this challenge from Jehovah: "Fear not the words which you have heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold I am about to put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." He further declared, "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow therein."

This prediction was fulfilled in most marvelous fashion. The siege was suddenly raised. Whether it was the threat of attack by Ethiopia, or a fearful epidemic of pestilence, or both of these, that sent the king suddenly scurrying homeward—much later to be assassinated by his own sons—we do not know. It was this deliverance more than anything else that strengthened into dogma the belief that Jerusalem could never be taken.

During the whole of this Sennacherib period Isaiah was active. He rebuked Judah's sins, he reproached the people for their fickleness, he pointed out Assyria's place as Jehovah's instrument of punishment, and the coming judgment upon that same haughty nation for her own misdeeds. In the hour of extreme danger he sought to instil some of his own courage into the frightened people. His only real success, however, was on the occasion described, when he persuaded Hezekiah not to yield to the Assyrian demand for surrender. This saved Jerusalem from massacre and pillage.

The first chapter of Isaiah, which probably comes from about this time, admirably sums up the main ideas of the prophet concerning God, worship, ethics and punishment. It is sometimes called the 'Great Arraignment.' Especially impressive is the way Isaiah derides vain sacrifices, and goes on to indicate the true demands of Jehovah:

> "Cease to do evil, learn to do right;
> Seek after justice; set right the oppressor;
> Do justice to the orphan, plead the cause of the widow."
> (1:16, 17)

Micah's Message.—During this fateful quarter century, while Isaiah was prophesying in the city of Jerusalem, Micah was carrying on his ministry in his country village. Looking upon the capital cities from the outside, he saw even more clearly than did Isaiah the sins that were hurrying the nations to their ruin. To his mind Jerusalem and Samaria were simply hotbeds of crime, incarnating within themselves the iniquity of the two kingdoms and in turn corrupting them. For him the cities *are* the sin of the nations. Speaking shortly before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., he exclaims:

> "What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria?
> And what is the sin of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?
> Therefore will I turn Samaria into a heap of the field,
> Into a planted vineyard,
> And I will pour down her stones into the valley,
> And lay bare her foundations." (1: 5, 6)

Repeatedly after Samaria's fall the Assyrian cohorts swept through Palestine. On one of these

occasions the prophet vividly portrayed the unhappy fate of the doomed villages in their path by making use of a remarkable massed group of word-plays, beginning,

> "Tell it not in Tell-town,
> In Weep-town weep bitterly." (1: 10 ff.)

For an Oriental these puns are not an attempt at humor, but rather an extremely effective device for arresting attention and impressing the tragic seriousness of the emergency.

Reasoning from cause to effect, Micah felt sure that the tide of invasion would eventually engulf degenerate Judah just as it already had Israel. Moral decay made her end sure. Her rulers were greedy, selfish, stupid, corrupt. So rapacious were the rich that the prophet vividly pictures them as cannibals. "They eat the flesh of my people," he protests, "and they strip off their skin from them and break their bones in pieces." Time-serving and faithless prophets, who set themselves athwart Micah's plea for a better social order, were the special objects of his vitriolic satire. He caricatures them as "the prophets who lead my people astray; who when they get something to eat cry, 'Peace!'; but they declare a holy war against whoever puts nothing in their mouths."

Most daring and radical of all the declarations of this independent thinker was his prediction that proud, unrepentant Jerusalem and its holy temple should both be destroyed. "Zion shall be plowed as a field," he asserts, "and Jerusalem shall become

ruins, and the temple mount as a high place in a forest." In this opinion he seems to have differed from Isaiah, who felt that the survival of the capital was an essential part of Jehovah's plan. As a matter of fact the city did not fall at this time. Nevertheless, so deeply did Micah's words burn themselves into the memories of those who heard them that they are quoted in the time of Jeremiah, more than a century later (Jer. 26:18).

Hezekiah's Reformation.—King Hezekiah was in the end so deeply impressed by the bold preaching of Micah and the wise counsels of Isaiah that he carried out an important religious reformation. One noteworthy detail was the destruction of the brazen serpent which was reputed to have been handed down from Moses' time. It had come to be worshiped by the people as an idol. These reforms probably took place after 701. Hezekiah's action shows that the messages of the great social prophets—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah—were at last beginning to have definite results.

A Summary of True Religion.—In the book of Micah is enshrined the 'greatest saying of the Old Testament.' It may have been uttered by the prophet in the favorable days of Hezekiah's reformation; or more likely in the reactionary reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah's backsliding son and successor, who reintroduced human sacrifice. Possibly the saying is by another than Micah. It makes little difference. In any case the passage is an excellent brief summary of the content of practical religion as proclaimed by the social prophets. It represents

the high-water mark of Old Testament thought, and still stands as a complete and satisfying statement of God's requirements.

The form is that of a dialogue. In their earnest but baffled attempt to secure God's favor the people are represented as crying out:

> "Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah,
> And bow myself before the high God?
> Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
> With calves a year old?
>
> Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams,
> With ten thousands of rivers of oil?
> Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
> The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

To this agonized question the prophet gives a reply which is so simple that its profound significance may easily be missed. He thrusts aside as comparatively unimportant all form, ritual, sacrament and sacrifice. In their stead he announces the ethical, social and spiritual demands of prophetic religion at its best and highest:

> "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good;
> And what doth Jehovah require of thee,
> But to do justly, and to love kindness,
> And to walk humbly with thy God?" (6: 6-8)

Biblical passages: Isaiah 20; 36 to 39; 28:7 to 31:4; 1; Micah 1 to 3; 6:1-8.

CHAPTER XXX

REVIEW AND SUMMARY

Divisions of Material.—The biographies we have been studying may be divided into three unequal groups: I. Samuel to Solomon, Chapters I-XV; II. Jeroboam I to Jehu, Chapters XVI-XXV; and III. Amos to Micah, Chapters XXVI-XXIX. The first group includes that portion of Hebrew history which extends from the establishment of the kingdom to the close of the reign of Solomon; that is, from about 1050 to 933 B.C. The second group begins with the division of the Hebrew kingdom and ends with the dawning of the new golden age under Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah in Judah; it covers, approximately, the years from 933 to 750 B.C. The third group is concerned with the extremely significant epoch of the four great social prophets of the eighth century, which extends from about 750 to 690 B.C. In all, three and one-half centuries or more of Hebrew life are covered by the present volume.

The Sources.—Our principal source-book for this period is, naturally, the Old Testament. Of its thirty-nine books eleven have been drawn upon for material. These eleven books represent three classes of literature: I. One story book—Ruth.

Here we have embodied in the form of a charming pastoral idyl a true tradition regarding the attractive Moabite ancestress of great King David. II. Six books of history—two books of Samuel, two of Kings and two of Chronicles. While all these books contain important historical facts, not a single one of them was written primarily as history. Rather were they compiled from various sources, differing from one another in historical value, in order that they might serve as vehicles of religious teaching and inspiration. Thus they are sermons given in the form of history. They sometimes fail us, so far as mere historical information is concerned, regarding several of the most important periods in Hebrew history. III. Four books of addresses and sermons—the prophetic collections of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. In each case the original collection has been supplemented by the work of later poets and editors. Consequently it has been necessary for modern scholars to separate the later from the earlier material in these books before using them as source-books of history and biography. In addition to all this Biblical material various inscriptions from Moab, Egypt and Assyria have been utilized in this volume.

Principal Characters.—A number of great creative figures of Hebrew history have appeared in these pages. Among them we notice particularly:

I. *Eight kings*—Saul, David, Solomon, Jeroboam I, Ahab, Jehu, Ahaz, Hezekiah; also three queens—Bathsheba, Jezebel, Athaliah; and one prince—Jonathan. The last-named is one of the noblest

characters in the Bible, a type of true and enduring friendship. Of the queens mentioned perhaps the less said the better—their influence was almost uniformly bad. Bathsheba was the evil genius of David, and Jezebel proved a baleful influence upon the life of Ahab; Athaliah was an unscrupulous usurper of the throne. Included in the list of kings are men of varying mental and moral caliber. And, of course, we expect to find all of these men reflecting to a greater or less degree the imperfect ethical and religious standards of their somewhat primitive times. Big, well-meaning Saul laid the first rough foundations of the kingdom; on these his greater successor, David, built a strong superstructure. Solomon made the kingdom showy and magnificent, but he lacked the qualities of true statesmanship; as a consequence it is he who must be held primarily responsible for the division of the kingdom that came at his death. Jeroboam was a patriot and revolutionary, who delivered the northern kingdom from bondage to a despot. Ahab had splendid qualities and possibilities which were, alas, largely brought to naught because of his queen's devotion to Baalism. Jehu was a sincere and devoted follower of Jehovah, whose fanatic spirit and destructive methods led him into excesses of which later generations could not approve. Ahaz and Hezekiah were kings whose comparative weakness is perhaps overemphasized by contrast with the more decisive and purposeful nature of the prophet Isaiah. If we try to think ourselves back into their period of history we cannot but realize that most of these

men were, despite their real and great limitations, of genuinely heroic stature.

II. *Three generals*—Joab, Abner, Amasa. All three are connected with the career of David. The life stories of these military heroes furnishes an eloquent commentary on the ruthlessness of ancient, as also of modern, warfare.

III. *Nine prophets*—Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah. It can hardly be doubted that the prophets are the most important as well as the most admirable of the heroes we have met in our study. It is a striking fact that all, without exception, are concerned with national affairs. In some cases they are as notable for their political as for their strictly religious activity. Samuel, for instance, anointed both of the first two kings of the nation; Nathan was intimately connected with the political activities of David's court. Elijah, Elisha and Micaiah played important rôles in the Syrian wars; while Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and, to a somewhat lesser degree Micah, centered their whole ministry about the growing menace to the nation from Assyria.

All the names so far mentioned are those of Hebrews. But famous characters from other nations also appear prominently in these biographies. Hiram of Tyre was a close friend and ally both of David and of Solomon. Benhadad and Hazael of Damascus were thorns in Israel's flesh during the century of strife with Syria. Of the Assyrian conquerors with whom Israel and Judah came into close touch the more important are: Shalmaneser

III and IV, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II and Sennacherib. The mention of these names is a vivid reminder of the fact that the Hebrews lived in intimate contact with the great oriental world of which they were a part. They lived, not in a remote and forgotten region of the globe, but on the busy crossroads of ancient civilizations.

Political Changes.—Four distinct periods can be distinguished in Hebrew national life during this era: I. That of the Tribal Organization of the times of the Judges, which continued in force during the earlier part of Samuel's life. During this period the Hebrews were valiantly resisting, with, however, only occasional success, the encroachments of the Philistines. II. That of the United Kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon. By reason of David's superb leadership the Philistine attacks were finally repulsed, and the Hebrews quickly became the controlling power in Palestine. Their supremacy continued in the main throughout Solomon's reign. III. That of the Divided Kingdom under a succession of military dynasties in Israel until the final fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.; and under the Davidic house in Judah. This period was featured by a century of warfare with Syria and, toward the end, by the Assyrian invasions. For a few years just preceding these Assyrian attacks, Israel and Judah enjoyed a glorious but brief Indian summer of peace and prosperity. Amos and Hosea, coming toward the close of the period, were the outstanding religious figures in Israel. IV. That of Judah alone. Isaiah and Micah came to

the fore at this time. The principal political event was the marvelous deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. from Sennacherib's besieging army. Despite this escape, however, King Hezekiah of Judah seems to have remained practically the vassal of Assyria. Judah survived for a century after Hezekiah's death, when it in turn succumbed to Babylonia, the power which had succeeded to the Assyrian dominance over that part of the world.

It is clearly evident that the Hebrews, so long as they remained united, were able to hold their own in contest with the small kingdoms of the West. But as soon as a first-rate world power arose, the weak and divided Hebrews could not permanently retain their independence. Their supremacy was destined henceforth to be, not in the realm of politics, but in the sphere of religion.

Social Development.—At the beginning of the period we have covered, the Hebrews were almost entirely peasants, independent owners of small farms. As political power increased, however, and commerce grew, swollen fortunes and vast estates made their appearance. Many of the peasants, impoverished by the frequent wars, were obliged to sell their ancestral estates and even their families to the richer classes. Thus slavery of Hebrew citizens became quite common. In addition, a large proletarian group made its appearance in the rapidly growing cities. A distinct class feeling developed. The poor and downtrodden became extremely bitter toward the unfeeling rich. By the time of Amos the

simplicity and democracy of the earlier national life had largely gone, and many serious abuses were only too apparent. It was largely to meet these wrong conditions that the social prophets were called forth. But it was only in very small degree that they were successful in their reform measures. It remained for later generations to take their messages seriously to heart and carry through the necessary changes.

Religious Progress.—Between the time of Samuel and that of Amos a religious advance was achieved that is nothing short of marvelous. In the period of Samuel, Saul, and David we find beliefs and conceptions that today appear most crude. Even down to the time of Elijah and Elisha some extremely primitive types of religion were common. Especially do the fanatic Sons of the Prophets represent a sort of religious excess that in our modern civilization is confined to the superstitious and unenlightened byways of the religious world.

It was apparently the struggle against Baalism that brought out the true and inherent ethical nature of the Jehovah religion. The Hebrews had been early influenced by this cultured but degrading worship. Later, under the patronage of Jezebel, Baal actually threatened for a time to supplant Jehovah as Israel's God. Elijah waged relentless warfare against the shameful cult, and succeeded in holding the nation loyal to its God of wilderness days. Elisha carried forward the work of his predecessor.

But it was left for Amos and his immediate suc-

cessors in the prophetic office to take the final, inevitable step. Although Elijah had banished Baal from Israel, Baalistic features still clung to the religion of Jehovah. To the task of purging out the impurities in national and religious life which had crept in with the heathen cult, the great social prophets definitely dedicated themselves. With remarkable insight they saw and then proclaimed the eternal fundamentals of ethics and religion—purity, righteousness, a social conscience, love toward God and man. Through their inspired messages there was begun a religious advance that is still in progress in our own day.

Results of Study.—In our study of these heroes of Israel's golden age we have sought to gain:

I. A finer appreciation of the great characters in this portion of Hebrew and world history. Even the faults of these men are valuable as warnings; their virtues are a lasting incentive to imitation.

II. A firm conviction of the supreme importance of competent and unselfish leadership in every generation; and, in particular, of our own obligation to furnish such leadership in so far as we shall be able.

III. An intelligent realization of the fact that there is growth and development, not only in individual and national character, but also in religion. Every act of every person either helps or hinders progress.

IV. Absolute certainty as to the vital and central place of ethics and religion in all life. It is quite

evident that, of all the characters we have considered, the prophets are by far the most significant; this is because they were pioneer leaders in the field of morals and religion.

APPENDIX

LIST OF BOOKS

Each student should possess his own copy of the Bible. Of the various versions available the American Standard Version is perhaps to be preferred; it contains the most accurate translation of the original, and its division into paragraphs makes it more interesting to read. If the student is also supplied with outline maps of Palestine and the Old Testament world and is required to fill in the more important places mentioned in the text, the stories will stand out far more vividly. The student's notebook should incorporate these outline maps and, in addition, such chapter summaries, special reports and proper names as may seem advisable. Stereoscopic views of Palestine (published by Underwood and Underwood, New York) may well be placed where the class can easily get at them. The classroom should be equipped with good maps; Kent and Madsen's series of wall maps with chronological chart (procurable from denominational publishing houses) is recommended.

As many as possible of the following books should be placed in the school library for the use of pupils and teachers:

I. Geography and Archæology

G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (Doran).

G. A. Smith, *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (Doran).

E. Huntington, *Palestine and Its Transformation* (Houghton, Mifflin).

G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*[3] (American S. S. Union, Phila.).

II. Hebrew and Contemporary History

George Hodges, *Classbook of Old Testament History* (Macmillan).
C. F. Kent, *Historical Bible,* 5 vols. (Scribner's).
F. K. Sanders, *History of the Hebrews* (Scribner's).
Bailey and Kent, *History of the Hebrew Commonwealth* (Scribner's).
Laura A. Knott, *Student's History of the Hebrews* (Abingdon Press).
H. P. Smith, *Old Testament History* (Scribner's).
G. S. Goodspeed, *History of the Babylonians and Assyrians* (Scribner's).
J. A. Breasted, *History of the Ancient Egyptians* (Scribner's).

III. Biblical Literature

Wood and Grant, *Bible as Literature* (Abingdon Press).
G. F. Moore, *Literature of the Old Testament* (Holt).
J. E. McFadyen, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Doran).
S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Scribner's).
H. T. Fowler, *A History of the Literature of Ancient Israel* (Macmillan).
F. G. Lewis, *How the Bible Grew* (Univ. of Chicago Press).
C. F. Kent, *Student's Old Testament,* 5 vols. (Scribner's).
A. R. Gordon, *The Prophets of the Old Testament* (Doran).

IV. Commentaries

New Century Bible (Oxford University Press).
Bible for Home and School (Macmillan).
International Critical Commentary (Scribner's).
Peake, *One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (T. C. & E. C. Jack, Ltd., London).

G. A. Smith, *The Twelve Prophets,* 2 vols.; and *Isaiah,* 2 vols., in the Expositor's Bible (Doran).

V. Sociology and Religion

T. G. Soares, *Social Institutions of the Bible* (Abingdon Press).
H. P. Smith, *Religion of the Old Testament* (Scribner's).

VI. Dictionaries

J. Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible Complete in One Volume* (Scribner's).
J. Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible,* 5 vols. (Scribner's).
Cheyne and Black, *Encyclopedia Biblica* (Macmillan).
The Encyclopædia Britannica (Cambridge University Press).

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